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THE SECRET MEMOIRS

OF

THE DUC DE ROQUELAURE

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500 *of which are for America.*

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THE SECRET MEMOIRS OF THE DUC DE ROQUELAURE WRITTEN BY HIMSELF NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH IN FOUR VOLUMES

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CHAPTER XXVII

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But before I proceed further, I must narrate a little circumstance which was related to me some days later by Madame de Bouillon, and which fortifies my opinion as to the small favour which the suffragan enjoyed with Madame de Longueville as a suitor, though, as I have said above, I do not mean to throw the least

doubt on the thoroughness of their political connection. The King, leaving Paris for the second time, had just proceeded to Saint-Germain to instal himself there provisionally, and Anne of Austria had proclaimed that His Majesty would only return to the capital when the Parlement left it to hold their sittings either at Montargis or elsewhere. Madame de Longueville remained in Paris, while the Prince, her brother, accompanied the King, and she thus showed upon the occasion, in such wise as could leave no doubt about the matter, that she dissociated herself from the court. No one was more delighted at this than Monsieur de Gondy.

Hereupon, blind in his conceit, the wretched suffragan supposed that the duchess had only broken with her kin from love for himself, and this idea, though it was as grotesque as any ever conceived by a churchman, made him believe that he could not show too much forwardness. So he wrote her a letter wherein he besought her to name a day and hour when he might visit her and be alone with her.

'Twas a mighty high-handed proposal, to say no more of it, and Madame de Longueville, being a woman little likely to come off second best in this kind of skirmishing, answered him that he might come on the following day punctually at noon, and might rest assured he would be satisfied.

Gondy's joy was inexpressible, and as might be expected, he was not late at the meeting.

Judge of his disappointment when he saw more than twenty persons in the duchess's salon, among whom he recognised MM. de Conti, de Beaufort, de la Mothe, d'Elbœuf, and the famous Madame de Chevreuse, whose beauty, by-the-way, was notably on the wane.

The suffragan was deeply angered at his ill-success, but as he was unwilling to seem put out of countenance, he said to the duchess with great composure:

"Being so early, Madame, I feared I might find you alone, and so fail of being admitted to your presence."

"We are alone to all intents," replied Madame de Longueville meaningly, "for I think I may say there is no one here who is not devoted, body and soul, to the interests of the Opposition, or who does not heartily hate Mazarin. So speak your mind, my dear Abbé; my friends have every right to hear what you have to say to me."

That day was certainly not one to be marked with a red letter in the amorous suffragan's calendar, and thenceforward he ceased, so Madame de Bouillon assured me, to dispute the duchess's favours with the favoured rival.

Not only were the addresses of M. de Gondy presumptuous, they were also as ill-timed as possible. Madame de Longueville had become involved in a storm which left her no leisure to attend to trifles by the way, and she was as one of those professional

runners who make straight for their goal and never lose sight of it. The harsh decree that had been promulgated against Mazarin, whereby he was declared to be an enemy of the public peace, the King, and the State, was a great step taken in the path of rebellion, and it was plain that the Parlement was not engaged alone upon this course, but had powerful patrons of its procedure. Madame de Longueville was well aware of this, and took a pride in making her salon the headquarters of the new power that seemed to be arising by the aid of disorder in public affairs and discontent among the populace.

Her aim in installing herself at the Hotel de Ville at the same time as the Prince de Conti was to promote these far-reaching projects.

I shall but mention the events of that memorable year from memory, nor did aught occur in it of much concern to me personally. Peace being openly broken between the Parlement and the Court, appearances were no longer regarded on either side. M. de Conti was proclaimed Commander-in-Chief of the troops, and M. de Beaufort returned to Paris in triumph. Within the town exploits succeeded each other rapidly. The Bastille was taken, M. de Broussel was appointed governor of it, and the Prince, who was still attached to the interests of the young King, seized in His Majesty's name the important points of Saint-Cloud, Saint-Denis and Charenton. As the Parlement-men had scarcely sufficient money

to furnish forth their soldiery, an idea was suggested to the suffragan which, though it must have cost him dear, he yet put into execution, because it flattered his ruling passion, which, as everyone knows, was a pride comparable to Satan's. He raised a regiment at his charges, which first saw service under the Chevalier de Sévigné, and was soundly beaten, to the great diversion of the Parlement-men themselves, who herein showed that, like good Frenchmen, as they were at heart, they could see their own absurdities and laugh at them on occasion.

I shall say nothing of what befell at the siege of Paris, for I was not present thereat, and the whole story is very well known. The skirmishes in the outskirts of the town, some repulses but more successes to either party, some fine achievements and yet a greater number of farcical ones, such is, in sum, the record of that unlucky year. Cardinal Mazarin returned to Paris in the month of August, and believed himself firmly established for the future. But the quarrel was renewed under a thousand different forms, and the imprisonment of the Princes, resulting from a sort of compact between the Parlement-men and Mazarin, was but the beginning of a new series of misfortunes and disturbances. The triple arrest, which, as the Duc d'Orléans phrased it, was a fine cast of the net which had caught a lion, a monkey and a fox, unsettled all and calmed none. The one result was the increase of force on the side of the Fronde, which cleverly

availed itself of their Highnesses' resentment to win them over. The raising of the siege of the beleaguered citadel of Havre was the signal for Mazarin's forced retreat, and he was exiled to Cologne. Then the civil war recommenced with greater fury. Condé roused Guienne and Anjou, and tarnished his glory by asking assistance of the Spaniards, whom he had so often conquered.

But I will draw a veil over the gloomy picture of these disorders, the principal inciters whereof were also victims to them, for I would rather turn my gaze upon that star now about to arise, bright and clear, upon the horizon. The time of the King's majority was drawing near, and as the sun's rays scatter and put to flight clouds and mists, so the first gleams of this new reign were already piercing the gloomy night-time vapours that surrounded us. Men of intelligence understood that light must sooner or later appear amid that chaos, and that the glorious hour was fixed . . . Hope and patience gradually possessed our hearts. We felt that Louis XIV. would come, and we were waiting for him.

It was at this time that play became one of my chief passions. Of course amours were still the sweetest and the chief business of my life; but the days are very long, and some intrigues are so swiftly brought to a point in boudoirs that a man has much time to spare, and it is no such easy matter to employ it well. Bassett and piquet were in high vogue

then; and I acquired a celebrity in them which drew the professed players to make a set at my stakes. In fact, I had more than once a bone to pick with some of those clever hands that do not deny themselves the pleasure of tripping Chance up now and then, and whose chief talent is to fix good luck by means that some decent folk would not own to. You must note that when all is said and done I am not speaking of thorough tricksters, but of certain rose-water cheats who think they are doing no so great crime, and treat as mere humours those passes which, examined by a severer eye, would be barefaced robberies.

There was a fellow by the name of Guiraudel, a witty rascal too, who had rounded off his patrimony by a goodly share conceded to him in the monopoly of carrying-chairs, and he suffered from this little fault. This was notorious; but 'twas usual to take a hand with him notwithstanding, for he could be watched, and it is difficult to be fooled if a man is used to the cards and plays with sufficient attention. Setting aside this flaw, Guiraudel was a sound player, and threw his crowns upon the table in a royal fashion. This is a good quality which must be held to redeem many peculiarities. I was always inclined to throw my cards at Bélesbal's head, who could not lose without stamping with his foot or cursing under his breath.

To come back to Guiraudel, I was with him one night where there was much good company, at Du

Gué Bagnols', a man of whom I have spoken elsewhere, but who was not at this time the wearisome and argumentative Jansenist he became afterwards. The assembly was delightful, and I remember that I saw Madame de Champlateaux dance the jig there marvellously. There were merry frolics until midnight, when supper was served. After this a great number of the ladies withdrew, and play was commenced. Guiraudel challenged me to piquet, and I accepted; a double row of those who meant to wager was formed about each of us, and the stake, including the onlookers' money, amounted to three hundred and fifty pistoles.

We began with trifling play. The winnings were even, for each of us made from twenty-five to thirty points. But at the second round Guiraudel, who no doubt thought matters were moving too slowly, contrived as follows. It was his turn to count; he reckoned up to twenty, then threw down an ace, and said:

"Twenty-four."

I stopped him, and cried:

"Is it the Port-Royal fashion to reckon so, my good Guiraudel? From twenty to twenty-four might be a reckless leap. Make it twenty-one, if you please."

Guiraudel, with all composure, recommenced his reckoning. When he came to the awkward place he declared three knaves, and said to me in an unctuous tone:

"Is not that perfectly right? I score twenty-three and I play twenty-four."

"If that is so, 'tis as good as may be. But just now there was no talk of knaves and you called twenty."

"I called twenty-three."

"Truly?"

"I am so sure that I wager on it."

"It would be a hard question to settle. Who is to be judge?"

"Besides the stake, I put a hundred pistoles on the table," said Guiraudel, "and if you take the offer, I shall appeal not to what my friends may say, but what your friends say."

"I take it."

"Monsieur de Châtillon, and you, Monsieur de la Moussaye," continued Guiraudel, addressing those nearest to me by choice, "did I call twenty-three?"

"You called twenty."

"You give it that way?"

"Certainly."

"I am the loser. Here are your hundred pistoles, Roquelaure."

He paid, as he always did, with a fine manner and a smile. Then we recommenced the game where we had left it. At the last trick, judging from the cards that had been played that the last he held was the knave of diamonds, I kept the king of the same suit. . . . Vain precaution! He played clubs, and

I was out. You may imagine what a fool I looked. I did not see at the moment what such a lesson meant, and some of those on my side were inclined to take it ill. But Guiraudel owned he was in the wrong, and had only meant to make a joke of it. He even offered, seeing that the thing was ill taken, to pay as if he had lost, to which the answer was that this was not sought, and that the turn should begin again, as if nothing had happened. Having made this declaration for my own part, I allowed the wagering to be cancelled for others who had staked, but for myself asserted that I thought Guiraudel's trick a fair one, and that I was resolved to hand over the money to him, leaving myself free to set a trap for him another time in my own way, and so bring myself level with him. So I made a show of forgetting what had just happened, and shuffled the cards with the most careless and indifferent air imaginable. I merely told him, laughing, that my good luck would be more propitious to me than his subtlety had been harmful; and to show my trust in what I said, I increased my stake to a hundred louis d'or. There were about half-a-dozen betting on each side.

As before, the first hand was of no importance, and the two scores were nearly equal. But the second hand was more formidable, for Guiraudel scored fifty-eight. At the third round I had splendid cards, and kept my opponent in hand up to the last round. . . .

At this point Guiraudel came to the crux, for he had two aces, and which was the right one? He turned them down upon the table so that I could see them, and exclaimed:

"Which shall I keep?"

And as he said this he regarded me closely, hoping to determine by the direction of my glances which of the two I feared . . . I moved no muscle, but looked at the ceiling.

He took time to consider. Then, having made up his mind, he fingered the card he meant to play without throwing it out. There went a shiver through me, for he showed an excellent instinct, and my hundred pounds were where the devil willed . . . but just then a rare notion came to me! . . . I put my foot out softly and quickly, and gently pressed his.

I felt that he took the impression; and convinced that one of his backers had given him this kindly advice, he changed the card and threw out the wrong ace sharply.

I merely said:

"You lose!"

And then I put the two hundred louis in my pocket, and shared out the rest among those who had wagered.

But as I saw him very dashed and seeking to find a sign upon the faces that surrounded him which would betray the officious friend whose good offices had cost him so dear, I said:

"What is the matter, my good Guiraudel? You look put out; whence your anxiety? Are you not sure you really lost?"

"Oh yes, oh yes . . . only I should like to know . . ."

"Whence you had the advice that is still tingling in your foot?"

"Well, to be frank, yes; who the devil gave me such ill advice?"

"Someone who thought he had no reason to give you good counsels; myself."

It was Guiraudel's turn to be out of countenance. But he made a brave show against ill luck, and as everybody else laughed at my trick, he made haste to join in the chorus. It must be owned in fairness that he had not a word to say. The tolerance I had shown *him* was the guarantee of *his* easy dealing with *me*, and if ever there was give and take, it may safely be said it was on that occasion.

My luck continued in the same vein, and I beat in succession, at piquet, bassett, and gleek, Bois-Robert, whom I have already described at the gaming-table, La Moussaye, who spoiled his best hands by wayward tricks, and M. de Montausier, who, I think, still went by the name of the Marquis de Salles, and who, as is well known, served Molière as a model for his Misanthrope. I made a splendid haul (amounting, if I am not mistaken, to ten thousand louis), and at last my good luck wearied me. I left the table in sheer

fatigue, and sought refuge in the first boudoir that I happened to see open before me.

Two affected women of the worst kind, the Councillor d'Entragues' wife and Mademoiselle de Gournay, who had had the droll meeting with Racan, were playing a game of twelve points with the most eager air imaginable. As I had nothing better to do, I made free to accost them, and cried:

"How, ladies, you too! Why do you not leave this terrible shortcoming to men? Women should never handle cards or dice in their taper fingers."

"But must not we kill time?" said the councillor's wife mincingly.

"Life is so long," said Mademoiselle de Gournay, with the sigh that is peculiar to old maids who have not yet abandoned the idea of marriage.

"But I do not see your stakes, Mesdames. Have you lost everything and are reduced to wagering upon your word of honour?"

"We stake no money," answered the councillor's wife, who was one of the chief *précieuses* of her time. "That would be too material. We just make the stakes out of our honour."

"Oh, that is quite different," said I quite seriously. "For then you risk nothing. 'Tis more prudent."

Madame d'Entragues, who, with all her laughable vanity, suspected no malice in jests, paid no heed to my reply, or rather took it as good sterling opinion. But Mademoiselle de Gournay looked askance at me.

No one can equal an old maid in nosing out a satire, catching a gibe as it flies, and guessing from half a word that a compliment is left-handed. In this respect the acuteness of their organs is prodigious. I perceived that I had cut Mademoiselle de Gournay to the quick, and at the risk of passing for ill-mannered, I pretended not to see that she was opening her mouth to confound me, and sought refuge in the adjoining room.

It was an evening of quarrels. About half-an-hour after this had occurred, I had taken my place again at a table where they were playing very low, and was amusing myself by frittering away some small amounts out of the gains I had won, when a singular movement going forward in one of the small rooms close at hand suddenly made me feel that a fresh adventure was afoot within a pace or two of me. I rose and directed my steps to the theatre of action; but ere I reached it Du Gué Bagnols came to meet me, with his costume disordered and appearing much wrought upon, muttering in such a way that he could not be heard by those whom his words concerned:

"Men at cards are a bad crew . . . but women! A gambling woman is a fury spewed straight forth from hell . . . God grant they do not set my house alight this night!"

"What is the matter?" I asked him, laughing. "Are they cheating?"

"I would to God they were!"

"What, 'tis more serious?"

"They are telling one another the truth."

"And who are guilty of such an outrage on decent manners?"

"A pair of imbeciles who are the cause of the whole trouble. There were six of us at the same table, and I was banker. It was all going well. But all of a sudden, over a doubtful trick, Madame d'Aure and Madame de Meillan fell foul of one another, disputed, raised their voices, and hurled insults at one another that would make a market-woman blush."

"One word, my dear Du Gué. Did they call one another ugly?"

"I think not."

"I undertake to reconcile them."

"But that is not all."

"What, there is something more?"

"The Baron de Villevort took Madame de Meillan's part, so his wife, from love of contradiction, pretended to side with the Marquis de Flers, who had been wagering in Madame d'Aure's favour; till Villevort, getting exasperated, set light to the fuse by calling his wife a coquette."

"Well, there is a rare calamity!"

"Oh, it would be nothing if his wife had not taken the challenge, and retorted by calling her husband . . ."

"Well, what?"

"Cuckold."

"Oh, that is more grave. How does the quarrel stand now?"

"At such a pitch that I escaped, to avoid the bespattering . . . but look, here they all come."

The stream of angry folk was in fact bearing down upon us. A considerable detachment of inquisitive people had increased it out of all proportion, and it might have been a tumult swelling by degrees. The two women who had originated the quarrel were each surrounded by a devoted group, in presence of which they abandoned themselves to a very similar display; for the one seemed on the point of being taken ill, and the other seemed on the verge of terrible hysterics; but both were in excellent health. Some prudent friends were using their efforts to keep M. de Flers away from the Baron, who, for that matter, was shouting far beyond any intentions he had of action. As for Madame de Villevort, her abashed air made a strong contrast to the animation of all the faces around her.

I had often seen her, and had reason to think my character was not distasteful to her. She knew that though I made profession of being firm enough in those matters that require to be gravely settled, I had more than once shown myself an apt and conciliatory peacemaker in the calming of unreasonable storms. So she freed herself from three or four officious friends, who were no doubt wearying her by commonplace consolations, and came and took me by the arm, saying with an accent of genuine feeling:

"Monsieur de Roquelaure, you have some influence on my husband's mind. He both esteems and likes you. You must find some means of pacifying him and reconciling me with him."

"Why, I should ask nothing better. But if it is true, as Du Gué Bagnols told me, that you called him a . . ."

"I was wrong, I own."

"'Tis certain," I replied in a low voice, "that those things may be thought of . . . and even be done . . . but they are never mentioned."

While we were thus speaking Madame de Villevort had returned to the apartment wherein the scene had taken place, which was now wholly deserted. There, feeling herself freer and less perturbed, she sank upon a sofa, and resumed in a despairing tone, which evoked my compassion :

"I know him. His imagination will carry him beyond all bounds. He will proceed to conjectures and suppositions . . . and very possibly he will suspect me!"

A pause of a few minutes permitted of her recovering from this keen alarm, and she continued, almost venturing to smile :

"Can anyone understand how I myself can have been so foolish as to . . . put such ideas into his head?"

While the Baronne de Villevort was thus lamenting her plight, I was seeking some means of rescuing

her from the dangerous pass to which her imprudence had brought her. An idea occurred to me. Whether or no it would succeed I would not have affirmed at the moment when it arose in my mind. However, I was resolved to try it.

"You fear," said I to Madame de Villevort, "that your husband's imagination may be too active, and that he may seriously accept the order of domestic chivalry you have accorded him?"

"I am horribly afraid of it."

"Reassure yourself. He will think no more of it to-morrow."

"Really?"

"Better than that. He will ask pardon of you on his knees."

"He will! What am I to do?"

"Nothing! I have had an explanation with you, and I am going to have one with him. All you need know is that you are quite innocent of that liveliness of which he thinks you guilty, and that you do not even know the meaning of the word you so imprudently uttered."

"But he will never believe . . ."

"He will believe anything. . . . Faith rules the world."

"But why," replied the Baronne, "not tell me . . ."

"The stratagem I mean to use? That would imperil its success. You shall know it when it has succeeded. Remain here, and do not move. I shall be quick and shall return soon."

The storm had abated in part during our absence. Madame de Meillan had left, and Madame d'Aure was preparing to follow her good example, while the Marquis de Flers, who had offered to serve as her escort, was attending in a kind of marital way to the last touches of her toilette. The only visible traces had been left by Madame de Villevort's poisoned arrow. The Baron was surrounded by two or three men and as many women, the latter laughing in their sleeves while they affected to condole with him, and he was breathing fire and fury, and threatening to have recourse to the Parlement. Being told that the Parlement had not the necessary powers to do him justice, he declared aloud that if need were he would undertake a journey to Rome, and ask the Holy Father in person to annul his marriage. To be able to conceive clearly how droll and strange our man's face appeared, it must be remembered that he was usually the most placid fellow in the world and the most careful of his peace of mind. So he was in an exceptional state, perturbed from head to feet, and to his ugliness (for he was ugly into the bargain) was now added a displeasing display of sweat trickling in big drops from his hair and his two eyes were starting from their sockets to such an extent as to cause alarm for their safety. I understood at once that the poor Baron needed cooling, and prepared to apply the remedy to his head. For there it was that his misfortune stuck.

"Villevort, two words with you."

"With me, Roquelaure?"

"Yes, with you."

"At your service."

"We must be quite alone."

"Very well. Excuse me, my friends. Ladies, will you kindly permit me . . ."

They stood aside. Villevort followed me, and when we had withdrawn into a corner, where no one could see us, I looked him straight in the face and said:

"Villevort, do you know you are a great fool?"

"How? do you mean that?"

"Why, thus, that you do not know your own happiness."

"'Tis a well-chosen moment to rally me, Roquelaure. . . . My happiness! So you are in a mood for mirth! How am I happy?"

"How? Upon my soul I pity you. How? Odsbody, in having a wife you are not worthy of."

"Thanks, indeed."

"A wife I wish I could find the like of."

"I wish you the pleasure," said the Baron, becoming angered.

"A unique wife," said I. "Innocent as a dove, pure as air, chaste as a girl who takes the vow."

"You make a rare show of her," cried Villevort, goggling with his eyes in the most tempestuous fashion. "A chaste wife, indeed, to call her husband a . . ."

"Just so. That is her best excuse."

"No, damme, 'tis too much."

"Impelled by the friendship I bear you," I continued, without taking heed of Villevort's interruptions, "and sincerely afflicted about so inopportune a wrangle between your wife and you, I sought her out, took her aside, and then with tears in my eyes and my hand upon my heart, I adjured her to tell me if the word attributed to her had really passed her lips."

"If it passed her lips!" said the Baron, clenching his fists.

"Whereupon she answered with that sweet and convincing accent that you know so well, Villevort: 'Mon Dieu! why should not I admit the truth, and what so great harm have I done? Unless I am mistaken my husband is so angry at the word *cuckold!* If I had known it was likely to vex him, I would certainly have restrained my tongue, but he had just called me *coquette* . . . and . . . tell me, Monsieur de Roquelaure, is not *cuckold* merely the masculine of *coquette?*'"

During this little tirade I had imitated the simple tone of a village *ingénue*, and I saw that my good Villevort, though he sheltered himself at first behind his Picardy incredulity (he was from Amiens), was eager enough to be convinced, and would only advance some feeble objections for form's sake.

"'Tis scarce credible," he murmured in a low, muffled voice, swallowing his words.

"You would not say that, my dear Villevort, if you had heard her. As for me, I was so convinced of the good faith of her question that I thought best not to answer it. I left her still in doubt, and if you take my advice you will do the same. A woman who does not know the meaning of such a word is a treasure."

"An angel," commented the Baron, whose marital pride was flattered.

"Amen," thought I; "the trick is done."

"My friend," resumed Villevort, "do me a service."

"Willingly."

"Bring me to my wife."

"That is easily done."

"I count on you to win me my pardon."

"I can guarantee it for you."

I took him into the apartment where his wife was anxiously awaiting the result of our interview, and reflecting in the most serious way possible on the terrible effects that may spring from a word out of season. At sight of her husband her face fell; but on a sign that I made, and on noting Villevort's nervous and awkward demeanour, she guessed that I had won her cause for her, and that the *rôles* were changed. The Baron, in fact, threw himself at her feet and asked pardon for the public outrage to which he had dared to subject her.

"Rise," said the lady majestically. "I pardon you."

When I considered that this touching reconciliation was my work, I nearly yielded to burlesque emotion. I might even have gone so far as to shed a few tears, but happily Du Gué Bagnols came and reminded us that supper was getting cold. I own that so many and diverse experiences had made me feel an empty stomach, and I had need of this bracing conclusion. At table I took a place near to the Baronne, who, by way of showing her gratitude, furtively pressed my hand, and assured me that I had wrought a very miracle of harmless magic. She was anxious that I should give her the key to the mystery, but I had a fear of Villevort's ears, and bade her be patient till the next day.

"You shall know what took place," I whispered to her; "but come . . . in true justice, do I not deserve a recompense?"

"We will talk about it," said she, beginning to laugh.

Then she added, in a more discreet tone, directing my attention, by her glance, to Villevort, who was seated opposite to her:

"Come punctually at mid-day . . . *he* is always out at that time."

What does the reader think? It was not such a clumsy precaution for an *innocent* of my making.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Comte de Bussy-Rabutin—A fête at his château—Description—The play and the ball—A surprise—The masquerade—An enchanted night—A forgotten chapter in the Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules—The fair Greek—Rivalry—A gallant quarrel between the Count du Lude and me—Wordy provocations—The best explanations are given at the sword's point—A swoon—The Marquis de Sévigné—Treaty on the field of battle—A strange way of peacemaking—We are fooled—Du Lude is more easily consoled than I am—Sévigné in good luck—I yield to a curiosity that thoughtful people may disapprove of—The dawn—A very strange sight—A love-scene *au naturel*—The thicket—Happy Sévigné!—I have never assisted at such a rare diversion—Prudent meditations upon love—Art and nature—A parallel—An unexpected development—Matters take an ill turn—The dangers of travesties—A miserable time—Advice to faithless husbands—How poor a figure the seducer cut—My prophecy of the consequences of the affair—My clever retreat without beating of drum or blowing of trumpet, in company of Cascarel—My confidences with Madame de Sévigné.

I SHALL always recall with pleasure the friendship I formed at this time with the Comte de Bussy-Rabutin, one of the most comely and amiable gentlemen who had ever appeared at court. At the time when he was enamoured of Madame de Montglas he gave a charming fête, at which I was present, and which afforded opportunity for many adventures such as deserve to find a

place in this authentic history. Among other things I there witnessed a singular occurrence which, I believe, has never been made known, seeing that I surprised the secret, and therefore thought myself under an obligation to be silent; but even silence has limits, and the itch to tell what one has seen or heard is so strongly inherent in human nature that it rarely happens a man can keep silence for ever. Besides, many years have now passed between that day and this on which I take up my pen to write, and everyone knows that time dulls many susceptibilities and gives authority for a great deal of licence.

So it was at the Comte de Bussy's château.

He had just obtained his grade of major-general in the cavalry, and the pretext for the fête was his obligation to join the army shortly. That pretext served for the fools and the gossips, but some of his friends, and I was one of them, knew very well that this great expense was in honour of Madame de Montglas, a woman of lively and caustic wit, whose beauty was much in vogue then, and was made the subject of a facetious portrait done to perfection by Bussy himself in that audacious book which occasioned his being sent to the Bastille.

Never had a fête appeared to me more brilliant or better appointed; it took place half within the château, and half in the park, and I do not think I ever saw, even at court, a more complete or better disposed choice of pleasures and attractions. The

wood was full of little orchestras which played melodies one after the other, so that it seemed as if the wood were enchanted, or that we were on that famous promontory of Lucania, whence the sirens, despairing that they had not seduced Ulysses and his companions, as they say, threw themselves into the sea. At the end of two alleys which led from the court of the château there was a large round clump of trees, to the branches of which a hundred cut-glass candelabra had been attached; to the right a magnificent theatre had been erected, the decorations of which were in accord with the splendid illumination which lighted it, and the thousand candles that had been symmetrically hung on the branches shed so bright a light on the turf as to dazzle the eyes. The arrangement of these lights showed much understanding on the part of the chief contriver of them, for after this fair circle, so brightly and clearly illumined, the groves of trees seemed altogether dark, and as if they invited those who were walking there to mysterious confidences. The actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who had obtained leave to come and give a play there, performed their part like folk who know their business and love it, and after this, when the fiddles gave the signal for the corantos and brawls, each of us sought as partner she whose favours he was openly or secretly soliciting, and the merriest *mêlée* that ever was seen was started at several points at once.

But another surprise awaited us. About midnight, as nearly as might be, and close upon an hour after the play had concluded amid the applause of the audience, we heard a hum of voices from afar, in the direction of the chief entrance to the château. Who is coming now? Who would arrive so late? These were the questions asked confusedly on all sides. But no response followed as their echo. Bussy-Rabutin himself, when asked by Mesdames de Montglas, d'Olonne and de Précy, who surrounded him as if they would have danced a chain about him, Bussy-Rabutin, I say, affected to know nothing, and called his gods to witness that he did not know what it meant. He even pretended that he felt some anxiety about it, seeing that now and again in his life he had incurred the ill-will of influential personages, and would not be surprised if they had come to take him and lead him away into exile—an assertion that was rendered less absurd in that precedents of the sort were not lacking, and there had been no hesitation about sending M. de Bassompierre to the Bastille and the Princes themselves to the fort at Vincennes. No one took this joke seriously, but such careful reticence redoubled our impatience and curiosity, which expressed itself in outcry, wherein it will easily be believed that the voices of the ladies drowned our own. We hurried in a mass to meet the new comers, and perceived by the light of the torches which many valets in various liveries were gaily flourishing, a most brilliant masquerade, com-

posed for the most part of women admirably disguised, of whom not a single one was recognised by us, thanks to the black velvet masks with which they had concealed their features.

From the reception that Bussy accorded them we immediately understood that it was a contrived hit, or in other words, a plan of the master of the fête to revive our zest at the very moment when some slight loss of its ardour and vivacity might be feared. It would be hard to give an idea of the transports with which the masquerade was received on its entrance into the park. The arrival of this merry band had just the effect of an unexpected reinforcement of fresh troops in the midst of a sharp engagement. There was but a little time spent in exchanging some gallant or satirical phrases, according as the person addressed wore a petticoat or a sword, and then the general merriment began anew.

The sound of the fiddles, the light of the candles, and those furtive contacts which the dance permits, together with those sprightly, mischievous whispers that pass from ear to ear, are inflammable elements that will not fail to kindle a whole assembly, especially if it be composed of gentlemen prone to amours and of ladies as coquettish as they are witty, educated in gallantry at the court of France, the richly endowed home of all fairest aspirations, all most charming caprices, and all tenderest passions. All Bussy's guests fell subject to the same influence, and in less than an

hour order was evolved from the chaos, that is to say that choices were made, relations established and preferences shown with a sort of wild temerity that certainly did more credit to our frankness than to our prudence. In all directions couples were to be seen in tender proximity, disappearing among the shadows; the conversations, begun in the frivolous and lively tones of gallantry, were ended in the distance, in the glades, amid the foliage, and the sound of voices gradually grew fainter, as the sound of a wave dies upon the strand. A supper royally served gave the final fillip to our minds and the *coup de grâce* to our prudence. A kind of possession seemed to settle upon the whole company, and between ourselves it would have been very strange if I, alone among my friends, had assumed, contrary to my wont, the manners of a candidate for priesthood or the attitude of a Cato. I could not but take my part in this rare harmony, and I did so cordially, as will now appear.

I had taken my place at table close to an adorable creature, whose face indeed I could not see, but she was so well made that a man might deal with her on trust.

So far I could only discern her complexion, which was as white and beautiful as possible; and her bust, of a rare shapeliness, was so supply set that in comparison with her a pliant sapling would have seemed a mere iron peg. Withal she had a

noble and majestic air; her dress, tastefully composed and admirably designed to set off her shape, was that of the Greek women in the time of the Byzantine Empire; her hair, the tresses of which were confined by a slight net, was of a most charming fair colour; her light blue bodice and skirt were made of one of those costly Asiatic stuffs which drape a well-developed form admirably, and show in excellent relief the ornamentation in gold and pearls with which they are embroidered here and there. As for her conversation, it was a continuous flow of clever sayings and brilliant observations; a prude might have held that for a woman of quality, she was too free; but in the eyes of the people of fashion the agreeable sallies of her wit, wherein she showed marvellous resource, sufficed to excuse the sportiveness which was natural to her and which she could but have suppressed at the sacrifice of her choicest attributes.

I pressed her closely, and was already forming some pretty hopes, when I made a discovery that went to my heart and aroused my vexation. My Athenian or Cypriot—as you will—was a coquette, and after two or three observant glances furtively cast upon her neighbour on the left hand, I plainly perceived that the same hour which had brought me so eager a passion had brought me a rival. Well, though I had no other cause of ill-will against this rival, who was the Comte du Lude, I fell into a violent rage with him, and thought that the whole matter might lead to a bad

end. So I redoubled my solicitous attentions to the fair one who had made a clean sweep of our hearts, hoping thus to have the better of the Count, who for that matter was a well-built fellow and not without elegance, though at that instant when I should, perhaps, have been careful to clear myself of prejudices, he appeared to me far more displeasing and hard to tolerate than he really was.

The Count noticed what game I was playing, and I got from him as good as I gave. If I tried to whisper a compliment in my pretty companion's ear, he took care to cut it off half finished by making her lean towards him; if I offered to help her to any dish that had been placed upon the table, he hurried to hand her another, so that sometimes she knew not to which of us she should attend, and refused both. And yet I thought, for our vanity will trick us, that she preferred me. . . . My knee, in tender proximity to hers, was swayed sometimes by one of those light voluptuous pressures which ravish with a foretaste of heavenly delights; her smile, when she turned towards me, was full of the sweetest promises; two or three phrases, of the kind that tell so little yet mean so much, had brought me in succession courage, ardour and hope. . . . Could I in conscience suppose that she granted the same to the Comte du Lude, and made an equal distribution of her favours to right and left? Were her two eyes being used to light two conflagrations at the same time, and was she

carrying temerity to the point of according two pledges at once? I was unwilling to believe it, for it would have been an insult to her and would have caused despair in me.

However, as I still felt some doubts about it, I meant to put it to a final proof, and boldly crossed the Rubicon. I beg that I may be forgiven this lofty allusion in respect of a very simple fact. The truth is that I took my fair Athenian's bare arm, and without otherwise asking leave, imprinted a long and chaste kiss upon it.

M. du Lude was in no mood to be behindhand with me. I had appropriated her right arm; he took possession of the left, and followed my example exactly, saying:

"Let us raise no jealousy; here are two arms that have the right to the same adoration and the same honours."

I was not so much annoyed with the Count's presumption as with the cool way in which our pretty masquerader allowed his liberties; so I took advantage of the repast being finished to say to her:

"Then for the like reason that you have two hands, fair lady, would you not need two cavaliers to escort you to the park?"

She was preparing her reply.

"Why not," interrupted the Comte du Lude, whose tone grew more and more irritating, "a clever woman, if she wishes to thwart prying folk, should almost

always have two men at her side, one on the left for whom her heart beats, and one on the right to carry her breviary or her fan."

"Very well, my dear Count," I replied, restraining my anger with difficulty; "and we have now to learn which of us shall occupy the better of the two places. . . . 'Tis one of two things: either the lady must give it, or we must carry it by assault. . . . Do you not agree with me?"

It is to be noted that at this moment Du Lude was on her left.

"Oh, my good friend," cried he, "what kind of notions do you show, and where have you learned such a way of acting? To make the lady humble her glory in the eyes of one of us or else subject her to all the trouble of a siege in due form! Why, your plan, let me tell you, is that of a simpleton . . . or a boor. You have not considered it . . ."

"I attach so much consideration to it, my dear Count, that I am resolved to have an explanation on the point with the lady forthwith, an explanation that I will extend to you in due time and place, though for the present purposes of it there is no room for you here."

"Gentlemen, you are carrying this too far," said the unknown fair, who began to be anxious about the turn the dispute was taking; "and as you already seem inclined to forget my presence, I will withdraw."

"I will follow you," said the Comte du Lude, making himself her cavalier by force, as it were.

"Not so fast," replied I, before he had time to take a step, "the way is not clear, my dear Count, and I mean to make a good defence of it . . . 'Tis a second position for you to carry."

And at the words I drew. While we were thus wrangling, we had withdrawn to some distance from the rest of the company, so that nothing prevented us from carrying out our intention, the more so as it is an admirable means of cutting such brawls short, and our two blades were already touching in the obscurity when we heard the sound of steps behind us. The masked lady was overcome with genuine emotion, and had staggered to the nearest tree as a support, while her loud and irregular breathing bore witness to the natural fear she felt in such circumstances. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning, and we were at the time of the longest summer days, so that the light of dawn was already strong enough to allow of our recognising the man who thus came to interrupt us in the midst of our amusement. It was the Marquis de Sévigné; his doublet was half thrown open, his hair was disordered and his shirt also loosened; he was steadying his gait, as he walked like a man who has supped freely, but would not have the fact appear.

"Eh, gentlemen," cried he as soon as he perceived us, "what mean these warlike preparations? A duel! A man's death may ensue here on our friend Bussy-Rabutin's ground. It would be a bad

return for his princely hospitality, and I protest against a night so well begun ending in tragedy."

Then he advanced and placed himself between us, stretching out his arm for a sign of peacemaking; but on a sudden, having perceived the subject of the quarrel, he continued, changing his tone:

"Odsbody, masters, I scarce know you . . . You, Du Lude, so skilled in the laws of honour, and you, Roquelaure, so adept in gallantry, to draw in a woman's presence! . . . Put up your steel, quickly, my friends, such things are never done."

He was right; we put up our swords without a word, almost mechanically.

Thereupon the fair Greek, who had recovered herself, drew near to us and said, addressing the Marquis:

"Excellent, Monsieur de Sévigné, excellent. I expected no less from your prudence and your courtesy."

Du Lude and I looked at each other. The tender emotion that the lady had revealed in speaking to the Marquis had struck both of us.

"Egad, Sévigné," said the Count after a longish pause, "you are in luck! You throw yourself headlong into a dispute which does not concern you—about which you do not even know anything—and upon the first word that you hurl at our heads, without too clear an idea, between ourselves, of what you mean, you are congratulated, thanked, and com-

plimented. But just a moment, if you please. There are some old scores to settle, and you will not take it ill if we deal with our own business before yours. Your coming has made no change, and the dispute is just where it was. Both Roquelaure and I think we have some claim on the favour of this lady. It is for her to decide between us."

"I could not put it better," cried I, approving Du Lude's statement with a gesture.

"So," replied Sévigné, "you demand of the lady that she shall make her choice?"

"We demand nothing," replied the Count, "but we beg it of her."

She seemed to collect herself, no doubt desiring to come to a resolve as to what she ought to do. At last she took a step towards us, and using those over-gentle tones which are usually employed to soften a disagreeable saying:

"Alas!" said she. "In such circumstances beseeching embarrasses me as much as ordering, and you will own, gentlemen, that you are pressing a poor woman who has but had a glimpse of you rather hard. What comparison or parallel could I make between you? Surely I should commit some injustice . . . or some mistake. . . . Well, believe me, it were better to defer this to a later time. Besides, we are leaving one of those late fêtes that confuse the keenest eyes and unsettle the strongest heads, and M. de Bussy has plied us with bumpers of such wine as, all unsuspected,

contains the origins of the strangest caprices and the most disordered wishes. . . . So beware. . . . 'Tis after supper now, and you love me madly. I protest, if 'twere judged upon an empty stomach you might detest me. So we should give these headstrong fumes time to melt away. . . . To-morrow you will be calmer, and I can pledge my word that we shall meet again. Till then, be friends. . . . You will have time enough to kill one another, if I say that either one has my preference. In the meanwhile, as I fear to furnish new aliment to your jealousy, I shall ask the Marquis de Sévigné to be so kind as to become my escort. . . ."

"To take you back to the ball?" asked the Comte du Lude, pointing in the direction whence we heard the fiddles playing a prelude.

"No, to take me for a little turn in the park," replied the unknown fair one. "I am much wrought upon, and the fresh air will restore me."

As she thus spoke she treated us to a curtsey, and we bowed in return with all imaginable politeness and humility. At the same time she took Sévigné's arm, and they both disappeared as swiftly as if they had been ghosts; they had entered the first alley of the park they came to, where they hastened their steps, and I heard them talking in a low voice and brushing against the border shrubs.

Neither my vexation nor the Comte du Lude's was proof against the marvellous piece of sleight we had witnessed, a thing done before our eyes, while it

had occurred to neither one of us to oppose the slightest obstacle to it. The same interpretation of the fact suggested itself to the minds of both at the same moment. Whether chance or intention had brought Sévigné upon the scene, it was quite certain that he had arrived opportunely, and we had been unmistakably sacrificed to him. The new posture of affairs was plain, and our real enemy was the man who had thrown himself between us and whose intervention we had allowed. So we needed no further explanation of our mutual thoughts than a hearty burst of laughter, and we shook hands on it. We had the remembrance of our ogling, our eloquence and our sword-play for our pains. . . .

"The Pearl of the East has fooled us," said I, scratching my ear. "She is a coquette."

"She is a woman of genius," he replied with emphasis; "for she discovered the only way, perhaps, to reconcile us."

"No matter," said I, showing my ill humour plainly enough; "I am not satisfied with my night . . . an intrigue bungled is a prognostic of ill luck."

"Cannot we begin another? As for me, my dear Roquelaure, this little reverse, far from daunting me, shall sharpen my wits and give me zeal in taking my revenge. Just now I saw Lafeuillade cuddling Madame d'Olonne in a corner, and I know them both well enough to feel sure they were talking sweetstuff . . . 'twas a treaty being ratified. . . . I will intrude

upon the midst of it, and let what will be the outcome!"

And Du Lude hurried off towards the château. I admired his indifference and strove to follow so good an example. But this was impossible in my case, and the mysterious lady continued the sole subject of my thoughts. What resolution could I come to in such a state of mind? It may be guessed. An irresistible attraction led me in her footsteps. . . . I hurried towards the grove whose shadows had rapt her from my sight . . . my search was for long a vain one, for Bussy's park was not unlike a maze. However, thanks to certain signs that I understood much better than I could explain them—a fluttering of the leaves, the echo of a sigh, perchance that dying fragrance that the fair lady's veil had communicated as it passed, I struck the right road at last, and instantly assured myself that I would not lose it again. The further I went, the more sure I became of my discovery. At length a very distinct dialogue held between voices of a different timbre finally convinced me that my instinct had not beguiled me. I was at the moment on a little rise, whence I looked down upon a lawn of square formation, round which ran a quickset hedge of a good height and very thick. The seats, which were placed at intervals, were further screened from prying eyes by splendid elms, the branches of which were affectionately interlaced over all the space of the square. But my curiosity overcame all obstacles,

and a glance deftly taken through a break in the foliage showed me how the errant couple stood. They were no doubt tired of walking, so Sévigné and his companion passed in review all the seats in the green-sward enclosure, and choosing that which appeared to them protected by the closest shelter, came and seated themselves almost at my feet. Chance has strange workings sometimes!

The conversation had been eagerly maintained and had reached, as far as I could judge, a very interesting point. 'Tis known how the voice rises; so, my ears being agog, I heard it all, attack and defence.

"Marquis! . . . Marquis!" said the lady in disguise, hiding her face by her fan, "you are putting some strange questions to me! . . . Do you know that you are very inquisitive?"

"A little confidence would be so easy to you," replied Sévigné in a caressing tone. "Just to think that you have only to utter a name!"

"That is just what I do not wish to do."

"Well, then . . . something else."

"What is it?"

"I only ask you for a sign. Is it Du Lude, or is Roquelaure the man of your choice? I shall put those two questions to you one after the other, and you will answer yes or no by a movement of your head."

"You give yourself a great deal of trouble, *mon*

pauvre marquis. Come, I think it will be the best way if I lead to the conclusion of the matter at once. No one has more esteem than I for the Count du Lude, especially since he fought so well with M. de Vardes, which was an excellent reply to those who wronged him by calling his courage in question; on the other hand, M. de Roquelaure's character is much to my liking, and there is no one in the world for whom I should entertain a stronger inclination if it could be a question of thorough and sincere friendship with him . . . but as for love, I have never felt it for either of those gentlemen. It is to be understood," she added, laughing, "that I only speak of the past; I bind myself to nothing for the future."

"Cruel lady, you seek to compass my despair, but you will only inspire in me a still keener desire to outdo my future rivals now. . . . From what I see, your heart is like one of those bonny birds that love the free air and covet liberty, so that they must be swiftly caged if the captor does not wish to lose them, without a hope of seeing them again. Well, I have set myself to be the captor of that heart, and you can imagine that the moment when I have it imprisoned in this cage of verdure is no moment when I should be so mad as to let it escape me."

"For pity's sake, Marquis! You treat my heart as if it belonged to you already by right of conquest. But allow me . . . I did not tell you that it was free."

Sévigné started, and assumed an air of alarm.

"You love someone!" he cried with a tone of anguish that could pass as very natural.

"Would that be so surprising? Are M. du Lude and M. de Roquelaure the only men at court whom a woman might love against her will? Think further, and you will find some who, if they are not of higher worth, at least are as good, and a woman might sigh for them, compromise herself for them, and even commit a folly . . . without showing bad taste."

"No matter who he is, I mean to ruin him in your consideration," cried Sévigné, in a fine transport. "I will make you hate him!"

"Take care, he is a friend of yours."

"I will compel him to give you up."

"I doubt it."

"I will kill him."

"'Tis questionable."

"Then he shall yield me his place."

"I think not."

"Perhaps you will be more believing if you see me at work in earnest. This at least I can asseverate, that without knowing you I love you . . . and to win you I would wage war on all my rivals, on yourself, on everybody, and, as M. de Larochefoucauld said concerning Madame de Longueville, on the gods themselves!"

"But if I were ugly?"

"Impossible."

"If I were ill-tempered?"

"With such a voice . . . it could not be."

"You are very confident."

"I am deeply enamoured, that is all."

The fair Athenian reclined in the seat, and the flash of her gaze, through the eye-holes of her black mask, seemed to be searching Sévigné's very soul. She resumed more slowly:

"Pay good heed to what you say, Monsieur le Marquis, for I warn you that, in spite of my seeming levity, I have a bad habit of taking everything seriously."

"'Tis so I mean my words."

"Reflect, too, that in these matters I hate the middle path, and either I shall consider this love you boast of as a mere jest with naught to follow on it, or else I shall certainly make of it the gravest and most important affair in my life."

"Why, in that you open the gates of heaven to me!"

"But think yet more deeply. There are dreams that begin so sweetly, and end so ill."

"This dream, if you agree, shall never end."

"Oh, if I dared believe you," whispered the unknown one in a troubled voice.

"Believe me, believe me!" cried Sévigné with the accents of genuine passion, and he knelt before her and embraced her knees.

There was an interval of silence. I saw that the

lady's bosom was heaving tumultuously; the ardent Sévigné took advantage of the liberties he was accorded as a man who knows the value of time, and I think, if I remember rightly, that my emotion was not slighter than his own. Peering as well as I was able through that kind of pretty prism which obscured my sight, I thought I perceived that matters were maturing with great speed. The Marquis de Sévigné made rapid progress, so rapid that the fair nymph, surprised at the ground he had already covered, became visibly disquieted at it, and begging him to rise, drew him gently towards her, unwilling, no doubt, to deprive him of all hope, but clearly understanding at that critical moment that the real means of enhancing the value of her favours was not to lavish them all at once.

"A man," said she, forcing herself into some composure, "a man is ever excusable in yielding to such follies. But I should be foolish, and unpardonably foolish, if I listened to you . . . for after all . . . you know what reputation they give you . . . that you are inconstant, frivolous, incapable of a lasting preference."

"Slander!"

"They say you are often at Ninon's . . .

"Calumny!"

"And to say no more than this, about which you can have no word to retort, you are married."

"I know it only too well."

"And married, as they say, to a woman who, though I have never met her, is reported as . . . very agreeable. Has she not pretty eyes?"

"Of two different colours," said Sévigné.

"I have heard she is pretty rather than not."

"Oh, oh!"

"And especially that she has a sprightly wit?"

"Yes," answered the wretched husband, in a tone of concession that was quite lacking in enthusiasm.

"You speak very coldly of her good qualities. . . But 'tis true that my presence easily explains that. . . ."

"Oh, I speak so with all my heart, that I swear."

"So you would be unfaithful to her . . . without regret . . . and without remorse?"

"Can it concern you?"

"Oh, it concerns me much. You have a bent towards inconstancy that makes me think . . . 'tis hazardous with you, Monsieur le Marquis, and if Madame de Sévigné is as attractive as they make out . . ."

"Attractive," resumed the Marquis with impatience, "yes, as attractive as you please, but when all is said and done, what is that to me? Her beauty is talked of . . . she may be beautiful . . . and yet in truth I know not if she be. I dare say I knew at one time, that's probable, but I have forgotten since. As for her wit, I have it trumpeted into my ears daily, and I can discern for myself that she is bright,

lively, clever, full of rare conceits and fertile in all kinds of brilliant thoughts . . . I have no doubt that it is all very admirable, very rare and very precious . . . I am not objecting or raising difficulties . . . but, after all, she is my wife. . . ."

"And a man does not love his wife?" interrupted this remorseless logician at the opportune moment.

"Oh well, he loves her in a certain way. . ."

"But not the right way. . . Come, I have had a great deal of trouble to get that from you."

"Frankly, I know not what you want of me, and do not follow what you mean. Am I thinking about my wife at all? Are not you everything to me? . . . Since it is true that I am in bondage, let me, dear fair one, shake off my slavery for a moment, and forget my fetters! . . . Are there not instants in life when the mistakes of the past and the anxieties of the future are absorbed in a present happiness? Here at your knees I make this earnest declaration to you. You in this hour are my joy, my hope, my life . . . all this fair display of nature that surrounds us and breathes in your being has neither existence nor beauty but through you. . . . Wheresoever I turn, whatsoever delight I long for, I can see you and only you. . . . Oh, confess to me, mysterious fair, that my hands, thus twined with yours, have at last made you feel a little of my ardour, and that you share my rapture!"

The poor lady confessed nothing, but her silence, at the pass in which things then were, was a blank

order which Sévigné could evidently use as he chose. Our worthy Marquis was not backward, and made his commencements like a man who means to carry matters to the very end on the spot. Master of the lady's comely waist, he had already drawn her down towards him, and now triumphed over those little resistances which in such circumstances are never more than the preliminaries of surrender. And yet he had to submit to a serious check; for when he sought to remove her mask she broke sharply from his arms and threatened to withdraw altogether if he renewed the attempt. Strange as her incognito might seem, seeing how matters stood, he vowed he would respect it, perceiving that she would be inexorable on the point and that he would gain nothing by haggling about such a trifle. This little disturbance being appeased, he returned to the charge with fresh ardour, and as always happens in these kinds of contest where the two opponents understand each other perfectly and are perfectly agreed, the action and the noise of combat were resumed—according to the immemorial usage—by kisses, murmured words, and sighs.

The two lovers supposed themselves alone. And yet they were not so; for Phœbus and I were there. And might not I have been compared to Actæon?

Mythology apart, it was the fact that I had not quitted my post of observation, and day was dawning more and more brightly. . . .

There are poets who express love in verse, musicians

who set it forth in notes, painters and sculptors who express it on canvas or form it in stone. The first reproduce the language of it, the second imitate its tongue, and the last convey its form. I say nothing of the philosophers, who among the whole host of the speculative are assuredly, upon the theme that now concerns us, the most remote from credibility and common sense. They seek to reason love out, and hereby have sometimes rendered it as tedious as themselves, which is saying a great deal. Heeding only the three forms of art that have been mentioned above, it is certain that each one has a value, and that we draw sweet meditations from poesy, welcome inspirations from a fine piece of music, and from a fair design the appreciation of a reality which we had but guessed at before. But what power of art can ever compete with nature, viewed in her most secret play and gazed on in her act? Let the reader imagine, then, the admirable sight which I beheld—a living background wherein every blade of grass that gave its mite to the glory of the scene was rustling and awakening in God's bosom. Let fancy depict the charming arches of leaves and flowers whence arose a fresh fragrance of dew, the large, deep-shaded glades, the silence which seemed a very conspiracy of pleasure against reason, the sweet morning breeze which was carolling among the branches; and below them, in the foreground, two young, fair and impassioned creatures, redoubling their lives by yielding

them one to the other, and adding, all unconsciously, one more gentle harmony to this magnificent concert of sunrise. Can an ideal be carried further? Let what will be said or done, this is the best picture, the fairest sculpture of Love.

But to return to our hero and heroine. Analysis is often lengthier than the deeds to which it has reference, and if I put no curb upon my pen I should run the risk of taking the reader so far that we should find it difficult perhaps to return to the point whence we set out.

Scarce credible, the aspect of the scene changed suddenly. I rubbed my eyes to see more plainly. The lady, slightly disordered, was standing some two paces from the bench on which the Marquis de Sévigné was still seated, smoothing the lace he wore and pushing the dishevelled locks of his hair from his forehead. But this was the affair of an instant, and he rose and offered his hand to his accomplice. But she repulsed him sternly.

"What am I to understand by this cruelty, my fair one?" cried the Marquis, in great surprise.

"You are to understand, sir, that there can be nothing more in common between us."

"Am I deaf? Can I have understood? You are saying . . .?"

"That from to-day you are nothing to me and I am nothing to you."

"Well, indeed," said Sévigné, whose annoyance

now appeared amid his astonishment, "here is an ending that I little suspected. But you are but jesting, I think, my fair friend?"

"Not the least in the world, Marquis. Come, let us return to the château."

"What! Both together?"

"What does it matter?"

"But the ball is not finished . . . the music and the dancing are not finished . . . if we return at the same time, people will form conclusions . . . they will talk . . ."

"Much less than you think."

"But you will let me escort you home."

It is my intention. It is only just that the Marquis de Sévigné, after the gross crime he has just committed against his wife, should at least escort her home as a favour."

And her mask, snatched off by a deft movement, was hurled aside.

The fair Greek slave, whose long curls falling to her waist, blue bodice and broad-pleated skirt had made us dream of Athens, Thessaly and Smyrna, disappeared!

It was Madame de Sévigné!

I do not think in all my life I have seen a man more out of countenance and discomfited than the wretched Marquis. He dared not meet her gaze, but stood with a bent head, as if he were under a ban from which he could not escape. A strange

thing was that he did not even try to stammer out an excuse or attempt any sort of exculpation. He had lost his pluck, readiness of tongue and good sense at the same time.

Perhaps my eyes had never been so busy, and they lost no single detail of this dumb-show, which, though it seemed trifling enough, was full of the menace that the culprit had deserved and of serious teaching. What she told him without speaking I should be sorry to reckon up. I do not know whether he in his confusion understood much of it; as for me, I was clearly convinced that, after the first explosion of her jealousy, she would think seriously of revenging herself.

Their meeting terminated in the most silent fashion that can be conceived. As she withdrew she caused him to pass before her, and they looked like two statues walking one behind the other at an equal pace.

"Poor Sévigné," I murmured, with a laudable impulse of compassion, "you have spent a night which will cost you dear."

I had hit upon the truth. From that moment all went amiss with the Marquis, and his estate, which was not very great, was finally dissipated in follies and caprices. He made a show at that time of abandoning Ninon de Lenclos, who had given him the go-by. A year later, upon a notable amour he had with Madame Gondran, he was killed in a duel

by the Chevalier d'Albret, whose place he had taken.

As for his wife, she spent her grief the more violently that she might console herself the sooner. 'Tis as good a method as any other of reconciling our pleasure with our duty.

A final word about De Bussy's fête. Though it was now past four in the morning and broad daylight, gaming, dancing, and the strolls in the glades were still in progress. The Marquis de Sévigné and his wife were saluted at their re-appearing with endless exclamations of surprise, and certain more or less free pleasantries upon the romantic pilgrimage they had made in the perilous obscurity of the park. The Comte du Lude was full of it, and could not explain the singular circumstance but by supposing that Sévigné had recognised his wife in spite of her mask.

As for me, I was content with the night I had passed, though little inclined to divulge how I had employed it; and perceiving that more than one indiscreet question would be put me on this point, I made for the stable-yard of the château by the darkest and least frequented paths. Then, having found Cascarel, who had fallen asleep while he waited for me, I gave him a good shaking, at the risk of putting him on bad terms with Morpheus for the rest of the day, and cried in his ear that he must seek out our horses in the stables. That answered

with him; for, like a machine freshly wound up, he mechanically directed his steps whither I sent him, and in less than five minutes we had covered ground enough to be secure from hindrance in our retreat either by the untimely pressing of a too zealous friend, by a gossip or a questioner.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I have kept the secret of this amusing adventure for twenty years. The only person to whom I have ever spoken of it was Madame de Sévigné, a little time after the occurrence, and I shall be believed when I say that she blushed to the roots of her hair when she thought of the pleasing posture in which I had seen her. Did not she ask me if I had not had at least the benevolence to shut my eyes? A rare question! . . . and how easy it was for me to answer it!

I took no advantage of the power such a precedent might have given me, nor, though I found her infinitely to my liking, did I even seek to become the accomplice of that vengeance whereof I spoke above, and which she began to exact much sooner than I should have expected.

I was never more than her friend.

CHAPTER XXIX

Amende honorable—I repair some omissions—Looking back—Monsieur's campaign—The siege of Mardik—The impatience of an unemployed soldier—I am at last included in a new undertaking—The siege of Bourbourg—Monsieur de Rantzau—We march upon Courtray—The lengthy resistance encountered at this town—Arrival of the Duc d'Enghien—Monsieur congratulates me—I am appointed lieutenant-general—An excursion to Amsterdam—Dutch fog—I look for loveliness in vain—I flee—Mézières—An hour at church—Abbé Truguet's sermon—Awkward consideration propounded by a hunchback—The Abbé's cleverness—My journey to Compiègne—Visit to M. de R * * * The forest—The fair traveller—A mad impulse—The truth as a compliment—Audaces fortuna juvat—A reward—What I learned from M. de R.* * *—Madame du Hallier—Her lawsuit with the Baron d'Hérouville—An old lady's amours—Challenge and retort—I mean to kill d'Hérouville—A convincing reason which prevents me—The results of a kiss—Rebellion in the provinces—Siege of Bordeaux—Attack on the Faubourg Saint-Séverin.

CARRIED away by the personal delight of narrating my past—for the pleasure of recalling one's deeds is an egoist's pleasure—I have but glanced at those events of contemporary history wherein I took no share, and have but roughly sketched those wherein I played some part, whether as active participator or witness. This was within my right as a narrator of trifles, and I have used it freely. But there are

circumstances which I ought to have more closely followed, for from their very gravity they could not fail to be among the prime factors governing the course of my life. It is well that I should repair this error, and to this end I must go back some years into that more auspicious time when discord had not yet declared itself among us, and the Parlement and the Court had not yet been seen at divergence nor rebellion sitting, as it were, on the very steps of the throne.

I think I have said that I took part in the Gravelines campaign with the rank of major-general. I was with Monsieur in the expedition of the following year, and was present at the siege of Mardik; but though this was a creditable feat of arms for the French and their leader, I was not called upon to draw my sword throughout the duration of it. Such a sight was well calculated to heat the blood in my veins, and the reader will give credence to my word when I say that I was like a horse champing the bit with impatience. Fortunately, they soon found some work for me, and the capture of Bourbourg having been decided upon, Monsieur summoned me to his presence and gave me his instructions. I cannot express the joy I felt at this, but to give some idea of it, I may say that I had only left Paris in the hope of distinguishing myself at the head of my regiments, and that for more than a month I had been left to my ease like an old horse or a rusty

musket. This, at least, I can affirm, that on the day when the trumpet called us to action, I was not the last to be ready in fighting trim, and I think this may be said of a soldier's spirit, that it is ever fresh, eager, and ardent. Campaign life does not weary, but rather renews his strength; the clash of steel animates his zest, the trumpet-summons cheers his heart, and the sound of the cannon makes a new man of him. All this, no doubt, lacks direct application to me; for I was, thank God! still active and in health, since at the time I was entering upon my twenty-eighth year; it is none the less true that my impressions of war were exactly the same at this time as at La Marfée, and that I thought—a fair deception!—I was still upon my first essay. . . . The result of the action set me right about this, but in a most pleasing way, and so as to greatly compensate me for being no longer at my initiation; for we took Bourbourg by storm, and my men performed prodigies of valour, to which effect I think I may claim to have contributed my share.

We were greatly assisted in this siege by the courage and experience of M. de Rantzau, who was thanked to the best of our power by being created a Marshal of France. For that matter, he was worthy of the honour as much by birth as by his military achievements, for he belonged to one of the oldest and most noble houses of Holstein.

We then moved upon Courtray, where the Duc

d'Enghien joined us with his army. Here the matter was much protracted, and the besieged offered a vigorous resistance. But Monsieur kept a good courage throughout, and the only words which escaped him in perceptible vexation he uttered against Cardinal Mazarin, with whom he was none the less on very good terms. One morning, when he had summoned us all to headquarters, he expressed himself as follows:

"Gentlemen, I have to give you a piece of news which will appear very singular to some of you, considering that we are the besiegers. It is that we have but little powder and but a trifle of ball ammunition. We cannot send to ask for some of the Marquis de Caracène, who is in command of the Spaniards, nor of the Duke of Lorraine, who is also against us, and His Eminence Cardinal Mazarin has brought us to this plight by his excessive parsimony or his want of forethought, so I have brought you together here to pray you not to defer the capture of the town, and to take measures for our entering into possession to-morrow morning, at latest, in the name of the King of France. You understand, gentlemen; we can still work our guns an hour or two, and even then it will be a close thing. . . . So take your steps accordingly."

His counsel was followed to the letter, and on the following day Courtray surrendered unconditionally. We naturally desired to obey His Royal

Highness, who was, in fact, very well content with the way in which we had eked out our supplies. And it was true that after we had entered the town we could still boast of seven or eight cannon-balls, though for that matter I know not how they would have served us, for our powder was completely out. It will be admitted that such carelessness has rarely been known, especially in a campaign by French troops.

Be that as it may, the affair brought great credit to me, and it appears that I gave proof of two or three happy inspirations on the field of battle, for Monsieur made me his compliments in person, and conferred upon me, by way of recompense, the rank of lieutenant-general.

Finding myself master of my movements after these two campaigns, and not being under any urgent necessity to return to Paris, I took it into my head to travel in Flanders, and proceeded as far as Amsterdam, the reputation of which town for commerce had long aroused my curiosity. I may say at once that I had no reason to congratulate myself on that long and tedious journey. The country around the town seemed to me ugly, and the town itself offered me scant gratification. What was Roquelaure to do in a place where the sum of pleasures consists, I believe, in walking in the neighbourhood of the Bourse, looking at the fine houses of the Heere and the Kaisersgraft, and visiting the Hôtel de Ville?

No doubt I may be reminded that I might divert myself by looking at the harbour of the town, which often contains a thousand or two thousand vessels, and these form the finest floating forest that can be conceived. To which I will make answer that it is in fact an interesting sight, and that I admired it throughout one whole day, and that a man's mind must be terribly ill composed if that did not suffice him.

The heavy climate and gross atmosphere of Holland were not without their influence upon my disposition, which within a week lost a great deal of its gaiety. So I soon took thought for my departure. But before doing so I wished to extend my study to the feminine population of the town, hoping that this study would repay me for my trouble. Alas! Alas! The Dutch women are a sad race! It did not take me long to see that the hands of these fair ones were of more than the size that betokens honest work and of a scarce pleasing shape; that their eyes were dull, of a faded hue, and of a melancholy lack of expression; that the greater number of them had bad long teeth, which were transparent and often loose-set in the gums; that their paleness was rather that of the sickly than of the interesting woman, and that their legs supported a form which was almost invariably ill-shaped, and were neither plump nor comely nor slender. So much for the middle class. As for the girls

among the vulgar, I was sorry to observe that they had execrable habits. As soon as it was cold, there was not one of them but sat to her work with a chaufferette under her feet. Their dress is not attractive; most of those whom I met during my short sojourn in Amsterdam wore a little white headband, under which all their hair was easily concealed, a bodice of white piqué, not fitted with whalebone, a grey-coloured jacket from their shoulders to their hips, and a slack-hanging skirt, whose one advantage was that it showed the calf, which, unhappily, was rarely a comely one. To this must be added that the Dutch women are neither lively nor merry; that they are alike ignorant of the arts of pleasing and the arts of loving; that they generally show a freezing seriousness; and you will understand forthwith that I hurried on my packing and retreated bag and baggage from this accursed land. When I passed the frontier I breathed deep enough to crack my lungs, and sneezed hard enough to burst my brain. I felt as if I should choke from the effects of too much hot tea, and that I was haunted by an infernal odour of tobacco. I freed myself from these grievous fancies so soon as I had lost sight of the foggy fringes of the Zuyder Zee and beheld the smiling hills of Lorraine. France took me to her heart again as an indulgent mother opens her arms to a spoiled child. For that matter, I had not been faithless to her in such wise as

should cause her to treat me severely. My brief desertion to a foreign land had but made me prouder of my country and more a lover of her beauties.

I played truant here and there on my return journey. Having no predetermined plan of my course, I let the whim of the moment govern it, and fared no worse on that account. Taking it all in all, I had a very quiet journey of it, and nothing happened to me which is worthy of being narrated at length. But I will make mention of two occurrences, of which one befell at Mézières, where I stayed two days, and the other in the forest of Compiègne. To begin with, here is the incident at Mézières.

It was Whit-Sunday, and I went to hear mass at the cathedral. But as I arrived at the moment of the elevation, I remained for the sermon, which I was told was to be preached by Father Truguet, whose reputation as a theologian and an orator was more established in his province than in the remainder of France, for I had never heard him spoken of until then. So I took my place in the nave, in front of the pulpit, and gave my mind to pious attention, as circumstances required of me. The Abbé went into the pulpit, solemnly assumed his black gown, and entered upon the finest sermon, perhaps, that I have ever heard in my whole life upon the thesis, which might for all that be disputed up to a certain point, that God has well made all that he has made.

No complaint could have been lodged against the attentiveness of the congregation, and I surrendered myself to the persuasive enthusiasm of Father Truguet's eloquence. But from time to time my attention was diverted by the nervous movements of a misshapen little man seated quite close to me, who was continually repeating :

" 'Tis not to be believed. My God ! My God ! Will not Thy lightnings confound this ignorant priest ? In truth . . . a man might turn Turk. . . . He will not leave off . . . the same silliness again and again. No, no, 'tis settled. I will become a Turk."

These mutterings, the sense of which it was impossible to divine, were uttered below his breath and on the tip of his tongue, as it were. I took no further notice for some time than to utter a " hush ! " or two in his direction ; then he would be quiet for a moment, but would begin again more eagerly than ever. Nothing was left but to put up with it. At last I let him alone and thought no more of him.

The sermon was finished amid a general hum of approbation, and I was one of the last to leave the church. I had reached the pillars of the porch, and was about to quit the place for good and all, when I noticed the Abbé Truguet walking towards one of the side-streets, and my hunchback, who was running after him, shouting :

" Monsieur l'Abbé ! . . . Monsieur l'Abbé ! "

Father Truguet stopped, and I, incited by that desire to know which forms a good half of my life, drew near, though I left a fair enough distance between them and me to save me from accusations of prying.

"Were you calling to me?" asked the reverend Father, turning round.

"Yes, you, sir," replied the hunchback, making a respectful bow.

"How can I serve you, my friend?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé, you can enlighten my conscience about a point of religion that now seems very obscure to me."

"You have my attention," said the priest, "and if my feeble aid . . ."

"What I want to understand is a very simple matter," resumed the hunchback. "Did not you say just now in church before a large congregation, Monsieur l'Abbé, that God has made all he has made perfectly?"

"Certainly. . . . Well?"

"Well, Monsieur l'Abbé, look at me."

And saying thus, the hunchback performed as fine a pirouette as has ever been seen in a ballet, and by this skilful manœuvre exposed to the theologian's view a protuberance of which it would have been hard to find the like.

"Well," replied the Abbé, slightly astonished, "what do you mean to say?"

"I mean to say, Monsieur l'Abbé, that if you can

succeed in proving to me that I am perfectly made, I will own you delivered a splendid sermon just now; if not, I think I have the right to assert that in all we heard there is not a grain of common sense."

Father Truguet frowned, like a man conscious of the difficulty. But almost immediately he resumed his usual tranquillity of manner, and replied to the enthusiastic disputant:

"My good friend, do not be led astray. . . . You are perfectly made, for a hunchback."

And the excellent Abbé went quietly on his way. The questioner, astounded by such a display of confidence, looked himself over for a long time, as if he sought to understand the explanation he had just heard. I saw him smile . . . and I could have sworn that he felt a little glow of conceit at the moment, and was beginning to feel convinced that the preacher was right. . . .

It was my intention to pass a few days at my house at Saint-Germain before I returned to Paris. But first I proceeded to Compiègne, where my good friend M. de R***, who was the confidant of my first affair with Madame de Lavernay, had had a little château built for his pleasure, and I had promised to accept his hospitality for a day or two.

M. de R*** was delighted to see me, and he invited all the gentlefolk of the neighbourhood to dinner on the second of the two days, that on which I was to start for Paris. As we had planned,

we were upon the road about four o'clock, after a repast which had been as merry as it was elegant, and the little band that escorted me promised to continue with me till night fell. While we were thus proceeding, the incident occurred of which I spoke above. We had been about two hours upon our way chatting, laughing, and letting our mounts take their own pace, when we saw a splendid coach advancing towards us, drawn by two Spanish horses of the finest breed, and surrounded by a numerous body of outriders, servants, and grooms, evidently prepared for a journey of long duration. We supposed at first that it was some gentleman of the neighbourhood who was about to take up his abode elsewhere, and was in consequence bringing his whole household retinue with him. But what was our surprise when we perceived that the coach contained but a single lady, clad in a costume at once rich and simple, and of a truly faultless beauty. The carriage stopped, and the lady, who seemed struck with the loveliness of the view, had had the windows of her carriage let down that she might the better survey the horizon reddened by the setting sun.

Messieurs de Laval, de la Moussaye, de Choiseul, and de Piennes, whose horses were walking in line with my own, looked at her from the corners of their eyes one after the other, but none recognised her . . . and they all agreed that she was one of those majestic creatures who command respect, and

in whose presence the science so easily put in practice elsewhere is sometimes forgotten.

They even turned towards the others of the band that they might repress indiscreet murmurs. We moved forward in silence, and soon passed into a thickly-grown glade, which set a green barrier between us and the lady on her travels.

"Gentlemen," said I to those around me, "I will own one thing to you, and that is, I have an enormous inclination to speak to the lady."

"What a mad notion!"

"Just so, 'tis after my own fashion."

"What would you say to her?"

"Whatever came into my head."

"Do you know her?"

"No more than you."

"Bah! you would not dare to."

"I should dare."

"Let it pass," said Laval, "Roquelaure has these fads now and then. But they get no further than talk, you may be sure of that."

"You think so, Laval? And if you saw me now approach her, what would you say?"

"I should say that you were just going to pass round her coach, look her insolently in the face, and then come back to tell us if she is as fair at close quarters as at a distance."

"Now see how my actions belie your words," replied I to Laval, clapping both my spurs into

my horse, and going straight up to the lady in question, while my companions remained where I had left them, motionless and attentive.

A few seconds had sufficed me for determining my plan of action. When I came within a few paces of the coach, I sprang to the ground, gave my horse to a servant, whom I had had the forethought to bring at my heels, and bowed profoundly to the fair traveller, who, at the moment when I approached, was alighting from her carriage, no doubt in the intention of traversing a part of the wood afoot.

"Madame," said I to her, wasting no time in needless hesitation, "I know not who you are, nor do you know who I am. You are going in one direction, I in another. We have never seen each other before, and 'tis likely we shall not meet again, so you have every reason to believe that my homage is sincere, when I here declare, kneeling at your feet, and with my hand on my heart, that I think you the most perfect creature perhaps that I have ever seen, and that you have the finest eyes in the world."

The lady was conscious of her worth . . . so much was to be inferred from her proud glance and the noble dignity of her bearing. So she did not receive these words as a mere compliment, but as a truth simply and solemnly asserted. It took her but a little time to recover from her surprise,

and then she replied to me, overcoming some slight emotion :

" Monsieur, it is likely, as you said just now, that our meeting will not be repeated. For it is certain that you are proceeding to Paris, and as for me . . . I am leaving France for ever. . . . It matters not. . . . I owe you some thanks. . . . Here is my hand, Monsieur."

To the favour thus implied she added that of withdrawing her glove, and I raised to my lips, and for a whole minute pressed to them, a hand as soft as an infant's and as white as alabaster.

The kiss lasted a little too long. She softly released herself, smiled graciously, stepped into her coach again, and set forth once more.

Now it was my turn to linger on the spot, to which my emotion rooted me, insensible and speechless. I was roused from this sort of stupor by the exclamations which soon broke out behind me.

" 'Twas fine ! " said one.

" He bewitches the women ! " said another.

" I am beaten, and I own to the defeat," added Laval, tapping me on the shoulder.

Hearing my victory thus celebrated, and proclaimed by the very man who had, so to say, challenged me, put new heart into me and restored my self-possession. I got into the saddle again, and was overwhelmed with questions about the means, most likely supernatural, I had employed

to compass my intent. I left these questions unanswered, saying, by way of excuse, that I kept that sort of secrets to myself. In the meanwhile, M. de R * * *, who, being old, was not getting forward so fast as we, and had tarried with the rearguard of us, came up, for he had put his beast, which was a poor one, yet headstrong, and guided its rider far more than he controlled it, to a canter.

"Did you notice," said he, "the lady who has just passed close to us?"

"Oh, yes! . . . what is her name?"

"She is Madame du Hallier," replied M. de R * * *, "one of the richest heiresses of Noyon. She is on her way to Havre, whence she will sail for Guadeloupe; she has five or six millions there in land, houses and slaves."

They told M. de R * * * what had just taken place, and he heartily congratulated me.

"To kiss Madame du Hallier's hand!" said he. "One of my friends, the Comte de S * * *, would not have blown out his brains if he could have achieved as much."

These few words were calculated to arouse my curiosity very strongly about the life and conduct of Madame du Hallier; so, taking M. de R * * * aside, I adjured him by his friendship to satisfy my curiosity on this head completely. I learned that she had been a widow for a year, that she was going to her brother in Guadeloupe, and that among her neighbours in the

country she had a high reputation for virtue, though she had also a fine crop of admirers.

"But as to that," said M. de R * * *, leaving his tale abruptly, "you are a Gascon, and do you not know D'Hérouville?"

"Only by name. He belonged to Bordeaux."

"Well, a strange thing happened to Madame du Hallier, and d'Hérouville was concerned in it in a way that was little gratifying to himself, but he got out of the scrape, thanks to his wit."

"Did it not happen," I said to M. de R ***, "in reference to a lawsuit in which I saw their names connected last year throughout the sitting of the Brittany Parlement?"

"Just so. The matter in question was the estate of old Madame des Mortreux, who was cousin to Madame du Hallier, and she had an undoubted right to the property. It is a really curious thing to know how she was kept out of it. Would you like me to tell you?"

"I should be glad."

"Madame des Mortreux," resumed M. de R * * *, who was a great talker, "Madame des Mortreux was about fifty, but she was liable to returns of youthfulness from time to time, and it was a point of honour with her to show the little town in which she lived that she was well preserved enough to suffer no lack of suitors. So she had cast her eyes upon D'Hérouville, a very perfect young gentleman,

whose manner very strongly recalled that of the elegant *mignons* of Henry III.'s court. Old men used to say that he was like Saint-Mégrin. He had the same look of graceful chivalry, the same light way of speech, and the same taste for extravagance, luxury and display. Madame des Mortreux would have been mad for him on far less provocation. Her passion was soon known to everybody, for she sought after him openly, and never left him at peace. As she had no children, there was no one to gainsay her seriously, and the amour of Madame des Mortreux, at the age of fifty, for D'Hérouville, a young gentleman not yet thirty, became the talk of the countryside within three weeks."

"In all this," said I, interrupting him, "I see no sign of Madame du Hallier."

"Wait a little. Everything in due place. D'Hérouville let matters take their course. He was a lively fellow who had spent a patrimony of some thousands of crowns with two or three merry ladies of Paris, among whom were Madame de Moussy, the sister of Du Gué Bagnols, the Master of Requests, La Clinchamp and Madame de Bressieu. At the time when he became acquainted with Madame des Mortreux, he was very much like a man in danger of drowning, who clings as well as he can to the first support he finds. His pocket was desperately empty, and he had need of all the influ-

ence he derived from his name, which was accounted one of the best in Guienne, to keep afloat above the disaster which continually threatened to overwhelm him. Madame des Mortreux worked miracles and set all this right. D'Hérouville was grateful, and it ceased to be a secret to anybody that he had brought his homage to Madame des Mortreux's knees. From the day when the amorous compact was sealed by the final *favour*, the foolish old lady was beside herself with joy, and would gladly have sent her old friends an invitation to be present, adding an impressive announcement that music would be played."

"I am further from Madame du Hallier than ever," said I, spurring my horse; but at the same time I curbed him in.

"Gadswings, how impatient you are! A man has no fair chance to tell a story to you, Roquelaure. Come, let me go my own pace. Let me see . . . where was I? Ah, matters went thus for about six months, and then Madame des Mortreux was seized with so violent a colic that she had to take to her bed. D'Hérouville behaved as a worthy fellow, and summoned all the doctors of the neighbourhood. The ill-natured declared that he had but set so many doctors upon her to make it impossible for her to recover. If it were so, he was out in his reckoning, for the colic passed off, and the invalid regained her health in a fortnight. This was made the occasion of a ball and supper at her house, and

the merriment was kept up till three o'clock in the morning. Thereupon, having waited till all the rest were gone, she told the Baron d'Hérouville that she looked upon her last illness as a warning of Heaven which must not be disregarded, and that she had therefore resolved to make her wlll. The lawyer, who was summoned without more ado, told me all the details himself. Madame des Mortreux announced it as her firm intention to divide the whole of her estate into two halves, whereof the one, consisting of ready money and certain revenues secured to her by deed, was to go to Madame du Hallier, while the other, comprising the castle and land of D'Estrelles, was to pass to the young Baron.

"D'Hérouville made some difficulties about accepting such a rare windfall, and whether the benefactress had to overcome his delicacy by a sweet violence is not known precisely to anybody, and I would not swear to it. However that may be, three months after the will had been signed, sealed, and delivered, Madame des Mortreux, who insisted on having her dresses as low-cut as if she had been thirty, caught the bronchitis, which brought her to her bed a second time. This time, all the Latin the Faculty had was wasted on her, for she died. . . ."

"Poor mad old woman! So Madame du Hallier lost the land!"

"Now that vexes you, does it not? The will was read. D'Hérouville, there being nothing irregular

to allege, came to take possession of the château the week following, However, he found the gate shut, and, when he asked what such a piece of insolence meant, the hall-keeper told him through the bars that Madame du Hallier, the late lady's cousin, had obtained an order of court to stay the grant of probate, and that judgment on her appeal must be waited for.

"Is that all?" said D'Hérouville; "I will await it."

"The lawsuit was pushed on in fine style. Madame du Hallier had the President's ear, and was on the best terms with several counsellors, who hurried on the hearing, and gave her every assurance of success. She was overjoyed. D'Hérouville simply stood upon his rights and the terms of the will, the clear meaning of which could hardly be disputed. The result proved that he was right in taking the matter calmly. In spite of all the influences on which Madame du Hallier relied, judgment was given in favour of D'Hérouville."

"All the judgments in the world would not make D'Hérouville an honest gentleman," I muttered in a surly fashion.

"That is possible . . . but hear the end of it. . . . As they left the court-house, Madame du Hallier, whose features gained in handsomeness when animated by anger, made her way through the press and passed close to her opponent. She stopped in front of him, and, looking him in the face, said:

"'Monsieur le Baron, you must own that your estate did not cost you a heavy price!'

"'Well, you know what it cost me, Madame,' replied D'Hérouville, without wincing, 'and I offer it to you at the same price.'"

"'Twas extremely impudent!" cried I, with indignation.

"It showed a ready wit, none the less," resumed M. de R***, smiling, "and you will agree with me that it made retort difficult. Madame du Hallier dropped her eyes, turned pale, and withdrew. She had good reason to. They say she has never forgiven D'Hérouville for the saying. As for him, he had abundant consolation for all the rancour she might harbour against him and the ill-will she bore him. He was young, the lands and domain of D'Estrelles brought him in a good thirty thousand livres rentroll, and—no small matter in our merry land of France—the laugh was on his side. What think you of it, Roquelaure?"

"I think," answered I, rousing myself with difficulty from my absorption, "I think you must tell me at once where D'Hérouville lives."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to go straight thither and crop his ears for him!"

"That you will not do."

"Aye, but I will."

"Nay, but you will not."

"I tell you I will kill him."

"Then I give you my word of honour as a gentleman," said M. de R***, solemnly, "that you will not kill him."

"And why not, if you please?"

"Because he is dead."

"Was it a duel?"

"No, sickness."

"It could not in justice be otherwise. A man who could mock such a woman was an inborn criminal and deserved to die a rascal's death!"

"Roquelaure," resumed M. de R***, stretching out his hand to me, "if we were not on horseback, I would embrace you, for Ariosto's Roland was but a child to you. What a heart is yours, and how easily inflamed!"

I let M. de R*** talk on as he would. For my fancy was completely captured, and the image of Madame du Hallier seemed ever to be passing and repassing before my eyes. A devouring flame seemed to hover on my lips, the remnant of the fire lighted by her hand. Cherished sorrows, happy days of pain when the mind swoons upon a word, when happiness wells out of a haphazard kiss, when impossible loves give a pretext for thousands of delightful dreams, whither are ye gone? Why have ye abandoned me? Such sadness is the joy of youth, and makes us just such a bed as a ship's hammock that soothes to sleep and gently rocks us.

My friends did not leave me long to my dreams,

and before they left me insisted upon some half-dozen bottles of Anjou wine, whereof I drank my share in such wise as to show them that my stomach was as sound as my heart.

That night, as I fell asleep, I was turning over this idea in a hundred different forms.

"If I set sail for America!"

On the following day this mad idea had happily gone from me. . . .

With this, we may, with the reader's good will, pass for the second time over the four or five years we had omitted, and we will return to the point whereto we were come before this chapter, that is to say, when the Opposition was at its height, and when I was in Paris.

It was not my lot to remain there long. The agitation was almost universal in the provinces, and it compelled Mazarin, the Queen Regent, and the young king to leave Paris, and betake themselves to the parts infected with revolt. In a little time Burgundy had been brought to subjection, and Normandy, in spite of the powerful influence that the Duchesse de Longueville had there, had also returned to its allegiance. Thence they proceeded to Guyenne, and the siege of Bordeaux was determined on.

I was called on to take part in the latter undertaking, wherein Cardinal Mazarin gave notable proofs of his skill in strategy, and the correctness of his dispositions in attacking a town. His Eminence,

before the decisive time, ascended the tower of Saint-Ivony, and from that point resolved beforehand on the order in which the action should proceed. Some part of the king's troops has been accused of not displaying all due zeal and activity in this siege. I believe this accusation to be unjust, and for my own part I can assert that the corps at whose head I charged did its duty nobly. We had received the Cardinal's orders to take the Faubourg de Saint-Séverin, and, by returning two or three times to the charge, we carried it by storm. I came out of the siege with a little more glory and a little less blood, for I was severely wounded in it. However, I recovered while the negotiations were in progress, and I remember that on the day when the amnesty was granted to the Bordelais, I was afoot once more, to my great satisfaction.

Perhaps I had need of a few days of repose, but it was written that the stress of life was to leave me not one minute's truce. Ever between Mars and Cupid, I could give no moment but the other seemed jealous of it, and in this case the result was that I hurried from the ramparts of Bordeaux to the streets of Paris, as if I had been uplifted by invisible wings.

Capricious fortune had still many victories and many defeats in store for me.

My intrigue with Madame des Lesdiguières will form the subject of the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER XXX

Madame de Lesdiguières—We revert to the past—A fool!!—What the word means in a woman's mouth—Serious enquiry into the subject—Description of M. de Lesdiguières—Self-satisfaction—Danger of playing with fire—A genuine passion—Roses and thorns—Discouragements—A cruel jest—Despair—Anger—A letter and the answer—Impertinence paid out—I abandon the ground—A retreat half in sorrow and half in anger — I take refuge with the Jesuits of Beauvais — The Reverend Father Daniel—A new Saint Augustine—Religious discussions that have little to do with my state of mind — Pious recommendations of Father Daniel — Jansenius, what have I to do with thee? — I leave the monastery — Consequences of a luckless passion — Vagrant follies — I take no more account of my actions — Guilty errors.

THE reader, I think, will not altogether have forgotten a certain little journey I took one day from Le Grand-Mesnil to Paris in the company of Madame de Lesdiguières. I had serious reasons for feeling aggrieved with that lady, and the pretty things she had said of me to her husband had made me so ill-disposed towards her, that I had found it in my heart to mystify her in a way throughout a whole night without yielding, as might very well have happened, to the seductions of her beauty, though this might well be reckoned among the most perfect that had

ever rejoiced my eyes. I had been wounded to the quick, and the very essence of my self-esteem had been attacked, so I had taken refuge in prudence, and this had at least saved me from a humiliating rebuff. I had felt very proud of this conquest of myself, and I had hugged myself about it till the day when, through a friend's indiscretion, I learned what she had written in her letter to M. de Lesdiguières, wherein she had said plainly that I was a fool. . . .

A fool ! ! !

I found it hard to reconcile myself to the word, and only accustomed myself to it with difficulty. Nevertheless, before I flew into a rage, which would have been mere folly, for I only knew of the matter by hearsay, I determined to await events and to preserve a dignified and becoming attitude.

A fool ! . . . because I had been polite, diffident and unpresuming ! A fool because I had chanted her husband's praises in every key ! . . . A fool ! . . . Who could tell ? . . . Possibly because I had not paid my court to her !

This was a ray of light. Perhaps another in my place would have taken this revelation as a crushing blow. But I discovered in it a whole seed-bed of brilliant hopes and a new outlook.

From the time when I learned through the officious services of a friend that Madame de Lesdiguières had written my eulogy in four letters, and that she had bestowed her confidence in that

respect upon her husband, I promised myself—not that I would be avenged, for the injury did not strike deep enough for that—but that with all the patient sagacity of a calm and cool philosopher, I would seek out the cause of that unprovoked attack—an attack concerning which I may also say that it was undeserved.

M. des Lesdiguières, who was a very agreeable man at times, but whimsical beyond imagination, was scarcely likely to interfere with my manœuvres. He was a husband in the broadest acceptation of the term—calm, indifferent, loving his tranquillity, and full of a robust confidence which he derived, not from such opinion as he might hold of his wife's virtue, but from his high estimation of his own value. There are people of this sort, who build themselves a splendid pedestal and live rapt with their own praise of themselves as in a ceaseless triumphant hymn; and these people are the really happy folk. They believe—with a simplicity which often carries weight with the commonalty—in their universal superiority. If they were allowed, they would assume all elegance, all distinction, all bravery, and all wit as their exclusive heritage, and would leave nothing for the rest of us. M. des Lesdiguières, thus absorbed in self-satisfaction, was hardly likely to prove a serious obstacle to me. He paid too much attention to himself to attend to me, and was too closely wedded to his habits, both of work and pleasure, to under-

take a surveillance which would have deranged his life and vexed his mind.

But though the land was almost entirely unprotected on this side, yet I could not conclude it had no protection. At the end of a month of marching and countermarching, and of little skirmishes and attacks, which involved no consequences, and yet sufficed to show how the land lay, I was forced to admit that the campaign would be long, the attempt hazardous, and success doubtful. I had many reasons for believing that Madame de Lesdiguières had yet to learn the promptings of her heart; she showed nothing of the restless impatïence that characterises a woman sated with repose and tired of freedom. She went a great deal to the court, to the theatre, to the Hotel de Rambouillet, and, what was most remarkable, she found amusement everywhere, and this in my view was the worst symptom that evoked my fears. But all these considerations did not suffice to put me out of heart, only I took example by the valiant knights of old, who, if they were setting forth upon some important conquest, passed many days in silence and meditation, and I prepared myself for the campaign I had in view by a seclusion that I rigorously observed, and by freeing myself without regret from that innumerable host of gossamer bonds in which, I believe, not one single hour of my life had not been entangled. All my ideas of gallantry, pleasure,

and love were now concentrated in one, and this thereby gained greater consistency and force. All the images of women that haunted my mind, and made my head a sort of harem wherein my thoughts could walk voluptuously, vanished at the apparition of this new image, and this was so complete that I now scattered to the winds all that remained with me of past attachments and souvenirs, and dedicated to Madame de Lesdiguières a devotion whose strict observances absorbed every instant of my time.

But that which had been but a diversion for me at first became a serious affair without my observing the change. Instead of my directing the contest as I had hoped, I found myself gradually enslaved by her. The further I went the more I lost my self-command —that self-command which is so powerful an ally and gives us such an incontestable advantage over our opponents. Perceiving these signs and tokens, I understood that I should now do better to abandon my schemes of strategy and follow my inspirations. Thenceforward a characteristic disorder appeared in my manner and actions. My visits became so frequent that everybody with the exception of M. de Lesdiguières was surprised. I used to arrive too early in the day and leave too late at night. Sometimes I might have been seen wandering for a couple of hours together under the duchess's balcony. If she appeared walking abroad, my coat, sword and breeches were sure to be visible among the party. At

the theatre I was at her side or opposite to her. To cut the story short, it will suffice if I tell the intelligent reader that I was in love in all the sweet meaning of that divine phrase, in love as I had never expected to be, in love as a man is who has passed into his thirties, and finds his heart grown younger by ten years.

My undisguised enthusiasm did not avail me at first. My passion was so plainly declared that Madame de Lesdiguières could not affect to be unaware of it; but the more I displayed it openly, the more did she seek refuge in a chilling and inexorable reserve, which would have wearied out the patience and quenched the ardour of a man more patient than myself. The various phases through which this curious amour passed are interesting to study. At first, Madame de Lesdiguières affected to have observed nothing of it, then she simulated the most innocent surprise, then she strove to convince me that I was quite unfitted to a serious passion, and at last began to laugh at me. This last stage of the intrigue completed my mortification, and I began to despair seriously. I shall never forget what she said to me one cold winter's night, the remembrance of which still makes me shudder, as we left Madame de Bouillon's, where we had passed the evening in so numerous a company, and with such a swarm of eager cavaliers, that I had found it impossible to take my place at her side even once.

It seems that my face had portrayed my disappointment, a very natural thing, but the dismal and slack air proper to disappointment ill accorded with the habitual posture of my mind. While we were seeking our wraps in the vestibule, I found at last an opportunity of offering my services to Madame de Lesdiguières, and even placed a kerchief about her neck.

"Ah! so 'tis you, Monsieur de Roquelaure," she said, settling her cape upon her shoulders, "I am glad to meet you."

"That is a happiness I have vainly aspired to all the night, Madame, but I have been deprived of it by those more fortunate than myself. . . . If you knew how I have felt it . . . I had so much to tell you!"

"Well, the case is different with me, for I have but one thing to tell you."

"And that is?"

"'Tis a bit of advice given by a friend, and you would do well to profit by it."

"Let us hear this advice. . . ."

"Mon Dieu! . . . 'tis very simple. I meant to warn you, my dear Monsieur de Roquelaure, that the new *rôle* you have taken up does not suit you in the least, and that it is laughable. . . . Only think! . . . The Marquis de Roquelaure masquerading as the man of sentiment, the sensitive lover, the Arcadian swain, tender, shy, and dreamy! . . .

What a disguise! or rather, what a travesty! Is it not as if Gauthier Gargouille at the Hôtel de Bourgogne were to play a serious part in one of our great Corneille's pieces? It is not within the bounds of probability, it is not possible. I tell you here in confidence, and for your guidance . . . your airs of martyrdom have been noticed, your loud sighs have been heard . . . and people have . . . made merry . . . at your expense."

I repressed an outburst of fury and contented myself with replying:

"What does the opinion of others matter to me? But what did you think, and what did you say, Madame?"

"Oh, that is a very indiscreet question. . . . I did like everybody else, Marquis."

I was dazed by the words. She went out, and I neither saw the door shut upon her nor did I see her enter her coach. The insulting tones she had plainly adopted haunted my ears like a melancholy bell; I was not used to taunts of the kind, and it seemed to me I was beginning to live in a land of which I scarcely knew the language and the customs. This ill-treatment jarred upon me the more because I felt a real change in myself, and for more than six months my thoughts, my very soul and life had been given to this indifferent lady, who made a sport of wounding me. What could there be for me in this woman's heart? Could I suppose that she bore me

a grudge for the imaginary wrong I had done her on the journey from the Grand-Mesnil? This would have been to suppose in her the narrowest understanding and the barest silliness. Yet, that apart, what motive could she have for hating me? Never, since I had devoted my homage to her, never had I neglected an opportunity, however slight it might be, of earning her favour and of suggesting my passion; so her antipathy—for she had shown a real antipathy—could but concern my person. I was displeasing to her for the very same arbitrary cause, now as in the other cases without reasonable grounds, which made me agreeable to others. She hated me without a motive, and I think that of all hatreds this kind is the deepest and most incurable.

The despair which this conviction brought me was coupled with a mortification to which I had been a complete stranger. The southern blood which coursed in my veins was roused to revolt. I felt it flow more strongly and return upon my heart. Oh, if this woman had been a man!

But she was decidedly a woman—there could be no doubt about it, the sword was of no use against such an adversary. So I beat my brains for a device, I sharpened my pen as best I could, dipped it in harmless ink, which the mere contact sufficed to turn into a biting poison, and wrote the following masterpiece of a letter without any very clear idea of what the upshot of it would be:

The MARQUIS DE ROQUELAURE *to the* DUCHESSE DE LESDIGUIÈRES.

MADAME,—You will own that you strangely misuse the right of every young and pretty woman to exercise her wit with impunity. This is, in truth, a privilege of your sex. What among us would be called insult passes among women as sprightliness, liveliness, airy raillery and sweet mirth. They are free to give offence, and matters have been so well arranged to their advantage, that under the cloak of weakness they show more severity than could be laid to the charge of the most cruel tyrants of the world. He who should reproach them with cowardice would be a laughing-stock—what need have they to be generous or brave? They are women, and they are weak, and there is no more to be said. And yet, Madame, fool as I am, I sometimes entertain ideas which are not everybody's ideas, and I fancy this camp of refuge to which you so prudently resort is not so inviolable as you think, and that you could be drawn thence, not indeed to have single combat forced upon you, but to be brought as an onlooker to such a combat undertaken in your honour. Perhaps you do not understand my meaning; but I will make it understood. I am not the dupe of those semblances of rigour with which you have so long destroyed my hopes. Some other, whom I do not know, but whom you know better than anybody in the world, is certainly the possessor of that love which you so obstinately refuse to me. He it is whom I would bring to account for your disdain. Show him to me . . . where is he? Where may he be found? Is he Lanoye, D'Emery, D'Andilly, De Biran, De Fiesque? For, let me tell you that all these worthy gentlemen are accounted to be upon the pathway of your favours, some approaching, some returning. As for my challenge, here it is already made. Show this letter to him who is your lover, Madame, and be he who he may, I augur too well of his courage to suppose that he will not think himself in

honour bound to avenge you at once. Ask him to take to his own charge the generous raillery you have so nobly showered upon me. The least he can do is to answer for you. Adieu! Madame, the only favour I will ask of you henceforward is, that you bring me face to face with him who has inspired in you the brave wit to which I have fallen the victim. When he will and where he will, I shall be at his orders.

And I signed in full.

When Cascarel crossed the threshold of the house carrying this insolent missive, and carrying it at the top of his speed, as I had rigorously enjoined upon him, I was upon the point of recalling him, and of destroying with my own hands this sad record of my anger. But Cascarel had strong legs, and it was not in my nature to recoil before any folly, however wild it might be. This one might turn to tragedy, and I could not discern how far its consequences would go, and this was the very reason why I finally resolved to let it take its course. I was curious to see the results of my work, and to realise to what perilous and unknown ways we may be sometimes brought by a savage and unreasoned impulse.

I had scarcely had time to think over these various considerations when I saw Cascarel return, still running and all in a sweat. I saw there was a letter in his hand, and at first thought it was my own which had not been opened. But it was not so; it was the reply. I leave the reader to imagine how eagerly I broke the seal. Here is the letter word for word.

The DUCHESSE DE LESDIGUIÈRES *to the* MARQUIS DE ROQUELAURE.

As I have nobody to send you on whom you may vent your anger, I was tempted for a moment, Monsieur le Marquis, to submit to my husband's view the witty reasons you give in your letter to justify your insolence to me. But I feared that he would not be content with laughing at it, and in truth your singular fury does not deserve to be treated seriously. If I were like the fair Madame de Château-Guy de Murat, who, in spite of her petticoats, is certainly a good deal like a man, and scarcely ever goes out but in high boots, astride upon her horse, with pistols in the holsters and a sword at her side, I should have come to offer you combat with equal arms at the place assigned. But, in spite of your fire-eating manner, the style of attack you have adopted gives me a good example which I prefer to follow. You challenge me with the pen, and I will reply with the pen. Since you find no place in my heart you pretend to believe and affirm that 'tis a place taken, though in reality you know well that this is an unworthy slander. Here is a poor vengeance, Monsieur le Marquis! Happily, when once I have burned your letter—as I shall do in a moment—nothing will remain of the calumny but a handful of ashes, that I shall scatter with my breath, and the wind will carry them far away.

And now a word about the grievous crime I have committed against you. I do not love you! This is intolerable to your pride, which has been misled by too many victories and blinded by too easy triumphs. But among what women have you lived! What have you learned by your long and vaunted excursions into the fair land of Love? Alas! I fear that even while your praises were being sung here, you have but borne to the feet of false divinities the incense that a reasonable man should never burn but on the altar of the true gods. Does the

man of facile success resemble those navigators who return from most of the countries at which they touch with hearts full of disgust and minds devoid of recollections, because they have visited there in haste and have studied neither language, character nor customs? But I will say no more. . . . What good end will such blame serve? Why should I seek to bring into a better way the man who, wounded by the merely passive indifference that I have shown him, does not refrain himself from arousing my hatred and contempt. I have nothing to ask of that man, nothing to tell him, for in him everything is falsified, his understanding, his mind . . . even his heart.

It was a crushing blow. My attack had but shown her to be greater and nobler that I had imagined in my most frenzied exaggerations. My unworthiness, after this little conflict, seemed to me so plainly and evidently established, that I was ashamed, and my first impulse was to think of finding some corner in the world where I might hide my face, on which I thought everybody could read the ignominious news of my defeat. My depair was genuine, and the deeper because there was added to it the disappointment and humiliation that everybody will easily imagine; so I persisted in my resolve to quit Paris. Two days after the incident of the letters I engaged post-horses and started upon the road at top speed. Where was I going? Whither was I being taken? The first man I met could have told better than I at the moment, for though I had given the postillion precise orders, I can truly assert that I had forgotten them.

I only remembered the end of my journey when I reached it. I alighted before a great building with high and sombre walls that cast a melancholy shade afar and before a door of thick oak that was surmounted by a cross.

"Where are we?" I asked of the postillion.

He answered in amazement:

"You are where you ordered me to drive you, sir; at the Jesuit convent at Beauvais."

These words restored me opportunely to an appreciation of the facts which I had in some sort lost in my perturbation and my reveries. Then I remembered that I had in fact intended to seek out an old friend of my father's at Beauvais, who, after travelling in Africa as a missionary, had retired to this convent about two years before. On entering the society, he had renounced his family name, which was one of the most famous in Orleans, and was only known as the Reverend Father Daniel. He had known me when I was very young, and his good reception did not fail me in spite of the too jovial reputation that attached always and everywhere to my name. As I was in very poor spirits the holy fathers, to whom I was introduced at the same date, thought they saw in me a new Saint Augustine, who had foresworn the vile delights of this life, and was about to astound the world by his conversion. The Reverend Father Daniel took the same view, and told me as much the following day. But as I did not wish to keep him any

longer under an illusion, I told him that it was not my intention to take religious vows, though even that might happen, for I was sure of nothing; but that at the moment I had only come to seek in the calm and isolation of the cloister solace for that unhappiness which my fellow-creatures had caused me by their ingratitude and perversity. This explanation, though in fact it explained nothing, satisfied the Reverend Father Daniel better than I had expected. It was not in his nature to force the vocation upon anybody, and though he was a Jesuit, he did not carry religious zeal to the point of seeking to effect my salvation in spite of myself. Only when he knew that I was to return in a few days to that impious world where the true tenets were subject to so many wicked attacks, he tried to make me an adept in sound doctrine and a defender of the ancient faith attacked on all sides by the many innovations that had originated in Luther's audacity. Above all, he strained every nerve to inspire me with detestation of Jansenism, and of that imprudent bishop whose name stood for this impious cult. During this casual sojourn among the Jesuits of Beauvais I gained this much—that I heard the history of Jansenius, his school, and his disputes with the Holy See many times; but may I be hanged if I understood a word of it! Good Father Daniel, who put a holy fervour into his instruction, thought he interested me greatly by thundering a host of discourses at my ears; some were more and some

less intelligible, and he brought into them, with erudition worthy of a better audience, the tendencies of Baïus, the heresy of Calvin, free will and predestination, the orthodoxy of the bishops and the infallibility of the Pope, the errors of the semi-Pelagians and the various systems of the Doctors of Flanders. The attention I showed as I listened to him overwhelmed him with delight. . . . Alas! poor theologian, second sight was lacking to thee! He never suspected that while his flight took him so majestically to the high regions of learning my heavy wings scarce skimmed above the earth, and that all my humble interests were centred in what I had left in the world and in my human memories.

At the end of a week this playing at a monk's life grew so wearisome to me that I thought of packing my trunk—'twas in sober earnest a valise a foot long—and of wishing Father Daniel the best of wishes. Our parting was a pathetic affair. He urged upon me with much unction the observance of those rules whose sublime scope he had attempted to display to me, he begged me not to swell the already formidable host of the enemies of the Church, and gave the crowning grace to his discourse by calling down upon me the blessings of peace within and prosperity from Heaven.

Thus overwhelmed with celestial advantages, I took the road for Paris and covered the distance by easy stages. This trial had given me but a poor idea of my taste for life in the cloisters, and all that remained

with me from my retreat in the Jesuits' monastery was, I think, one of those insatiable appetites that result from too long abstinence, and require for their satisfaction a savoury diet and heaped-up dishes.

The ill-success of my passion for Madame de Lesdiguières brought its consequences. After the monastery aberration came the aberration of debauchery. I had determined to dull my senses at all hazards, and I carried out this mad plan in such a way as to scandalise even the most indulgent.

"She hates me!" I often cried in the access of my fury, which had become little less than a disease. "So much the better. I will show her that I care nothing for her hatred. She despises me! Well, she shall have good reason for it."

Madman that I was! I was seeking to overcome her dislike by the very traits that had evoked it, and I thought, while I rendered myself contemptible in her eyes, that I was inspiring her with regrets and with compassion . . . perhaps even with remorse! Then I understood better than I had ever done before, that Love contains the commencements of every vice and of every virtue, and of the greatest crimes as well as of the noblest deeds. 'Tis this giddiness which impels a man, according to the circumstances in which he is, either to good or evil, and makes of him—if he is of the heroic cast—either a prodigy of glory or a monster of perversity.

If I, upon the occasion of which I have just

spoken, did not attain to the degree of degradation which the second term of the dilemma implies, it is none the less true that I plunged without restraint into an abyss of artificial delights and intolerable excesses, where I soon found nothing but weariness, unreality and disgust. . . Even this did not cure me! And I was now able to learn from my own experience that nothing is so tenacious as a passion from which we seek to liberate ourselves, and that all our struggles to recover liberty only rivet the chains the closer upon us.

The succeeding chapter will demonstrate this beyond question to the reader if he will take the trouble to peruse it.

CHAPTER XXXI

I fall ill—A fixed idea—Walks at Les Feuillants—My love objects to severe discipline—Torments of jealousy—A gleam of hope—A torchlight hunt—The piqueur—The supposed lackey—Madame des Lesdiguières is queen of the fête—A compliment on my livery—A woman between two admirers—Obscure allusions—The flight—A race—Biran and Rambouillet are conquered—A terrible incident—The runaway horse—Close to death—A providential rescue—Madame de Lesdiguières and her saviour—The reconciliation—All places are good for declaring oneself in—Unexpected progress——A tried friendship—A singular service is demanded of me—The private secretary—A trait of heroism—Enough to turn one's head—A love message.

To the fugitive frenzies of which I have named the succeeding phases there soon followed such a prostration of my strength and will as left me able to do nothing but regret my errors and grieve over my shameful aberrations. This state of mind brought physical consequences, and I fell dangerously ill and kept my bed a whole month. I must do my friends justice, both men and women. Not one deserted me in these sad circumstances, and I had that inexpressible joy, during the several days while the danger persisted, of perceiving that I was the object of sincere anxiety and of eager services rendered with a universal willingness that touched me deeply.

When I recovered, the first name that recurred to my memory was that of Madame de Lesdiguières, and the first image that arose upon my thoughts was hers. The first time I went forth I turned my steps towards her house, and when my sleep, becoming calmer and more clear, was completely freed from the confused hallucinations of fever, my first dream was of her. . . .

I learned from Ménage that she sometimes walked in the Feuillants with much company, and this led many to say that she was Queen of Beauty for the moment, and that she never went out without being surrounded by her court.

No single day passed that I did not go to the Feuillants. I always took care to be accompanied by somebody, so that I should not be obliged to stop. Each time I met her, I confirmed the observation that her husband was rarely at her side, and that two new cavaliers, MM. de Biran and de Rambouillet were rivals for the honour of waiting upon her. Each time that I passed by her she preserved the same cold and impassive look, and we exchanged salutes and that was all.

But my love was not long satisfied with such methods, and it must be owned that upon this diet it had to go fasting; jealousy wrought havoc in me, for as I had failed to establish my rule over the fair lady's heart, my only real consolation would have been to see that others failed as I had done. In love

we are never charitable. I felt convinced that no one could associate with Madame de Lesdiguières without loving her, I formed conjectures the one upon the other, and made deductions the one from the other, and the result was that I inevitably came to this conclusion—that it was very unlikely she showed disfavour to all her suitors at one and the same time. This idea had great weight with me, and I felt that I should know no peace until I had resolved the following question, which seemed to me to be beyond all contradiction the most important that any man in the world had ever had to answer, namely: Was there under the broad heaven any man so fortunate as to be loved by Madame de Lesdiguières, and if so, by what means could I wreak my vengeance on him?

I ransacked my mind for a long time, but found nothing for the case; I no longer frequented the duke's house, and it was evident that there was the place for me to discover unobserved what I was so eager to know. As for the two or three circles in which it would have been easy for me to meet the cause of my torments, I never appeared among them from the day when the duchess's lively wit had been so smartly employed at my expense. Besides, I thought of myself as a conquered athlete, and shuddered at the thought of offering myself as a spectacle to people who, perhaps, would be malicious enough to show pity at my plight and openly condole over it.

I found myself at a desperate pass. And at that

very time an opportunity, created by my inventive talent, gave promise of a magnificent success. A hunting-party was to meet by torchlight in the Forest of Saint-Germain, and Madame de Lesdiguières and many ladies of the court had promised to be present at it. No sooner had I heard of it than I determined to be there myself, but rather as a spectator than a participator. Yet I had a part to fill; but this part, as will be seen, was not one of the first importance, and had the inestimable advantage of allowing me to observe without being observed. To explain more plainly, I bribed one of the duchess's servants, who promised me a complete huntsman's costume for the occasion. In this disguise, which the worthy servant brought me in all good faith, supposing himself the accomplice of some harmless joke merely, I followed upon Madame de Lesdiguières' traces, watched all her actions, and studied her slightest movements, for it was evident that I was not suspected, and that I should be the unchosen confidant of many fleeting gestures and whispered words.

It was to be a great day for me, and I awaited it with impatience.

At last it came!

We were in the middle of September, and the weather gave the most favourable promise. It was neither hot nor cold, and the earth, moistened by a storm of rain which had fallen on the preceding day, was neither too dusty nor too damp, and the

fine thickets of the Forest of Saint-Germain scattered afar their pleasing murmurs and their sweet fragrance. The start was to be made from the Count de L * * *'s château. I will refrain from writing his name here out of regard for his family, whose fair renown he afterwards sullied. At seven o'clock the hounds met and the horns began to sound. I was punctual at my post. As it was customary for these kinds of entertainments to hire what in some houses were called *valets de passage*, the other servants were not surprised to see a fresh face among them, the more so that my huntsman's coat, I own to my shame, fitted me marvellously, and seemed to have been made on purpose for me. I had, too, greatly modified my expression by cutting my moustaches short and wearing a red wig, which gave me a splendidly simple air, as of a Picardy or Norman peasant. However, as I did not wish to attract the attention of my comrades in livery more than I could help, I played the part of the timid youth, and kept myself apart as much as I could. This manœuvre did not prevent me from keeping my eyes open; I keenly noticed all that passed in the court of the château, the gates of which were thrown wide open to give passage to the numerous cavalcade. My heart beat as if it would burst my breast, and, being desirous to keep busy-bodies off me, I had devised the stratagem of secretly spurring my horse; this was an ingenious means, for I was continually

occupied in controlling his plunges, and thus was able to leave unanswered the silly questions that were addressed to me by my new friends the lackeys, who, I may say in passing, are the most gossiping and inquisitive folk I know.

It was eight o'clock when we moved off. The whole town was at the windows. There were most charming ladies in the party, whose costumes might be accounted marvels of elegance and luxury. . . . For my part, I saw but one . . . and I know not if it were the effect of that passion which possessed my soul, but it seemed to me that she was the fairest and the most brilliant of all, and that she might have passed for a goddess who had deigned to descend from Olympus to mingle with mortals for a moment. She had a magnificent habit of dove-coloured cloth bordered at the edge with light gold and silver braidings, scarcely to be discerned and delicately threaded over the material, an underskirt of dark-coloured satin, a stomacher of brown velvet cut low in a point ; her head-covering was an enamelled hair-net whence hung a veil negligently thrown upon her shoulders. Her fine hair, dressed in side-ringlets, fell over her neck in wavy locks and fluttered upon her bodice, which was cut low enough to let those beauties be divined wherein the perfection of divinely sculptured marble seemed to rival the whiteness of snow. Moreover, her grace, her dignity, her noble and simple ease were such as to drive all her rivals to despair. Then her horse, with

arched neck, proud beneath his rich trappings, seemed to understand what honour was done him when he was entrusted with such a marvel. He pawed the ground softly as if he were in a merry mood, and the fair horsewoman, caressing him with her hand, took advantage of his unexpected movements to show yet more plainly the endless resources of her agility and address.

Soon we were in the midst of the forest; midnight was agreed upon for a general rendezvous, and then the more eager sportsmen broke out upon the various alleys along which the beaters had been at work throughout the day. It was a fine sight, these twelve or fifteen gentlemen, setting out in different directions, followed by a pack of hounds whose bayings might well strike terror into the denizens of the wood, and plunging their way amid the unsteady lights thrown by the wavering torches through the most difficult passages and along the darkest paths. The whole chase would offer a fine subject for description, but with my reader's goodwill, I will limit myself to what I saw. When the feminine portion of the cavalcade abandoned all pretentions beyond a simple promenade, I of course stayed among that part of the escort which was separated from the hunting-party. From that moment I commenced my observations, and as will be seen, my imagination had abundant scope for interpretations, inductions, espials, surprises and torments.

As at the Feuillants, MM. de Biran and de

Rambouillet took their places at Madame de Lesdiguières' side. The former seemed as melancholy as the latter seemed merry; whence I concluded with a great show of reason, it will be allowed, that the one had experienced some mortifying refusal, while perhaps the other . . .!

This idea so startled my nerves that I dug my spurs into my horse without intending it. . . . He reared, and then broke into a gallop without my being able to hold him in. I was obliged, in order to return to my station, that is to say, to get behind the party again, to pass completely round the noble company.

I heard Madame de Lesdiguières say to Madame de Bouillon, bending towards her:

"Does that groom belong to you, my dear Countess? See . . . he has not a bad manner."

Madame de Bouillon looked me straight in the face and answered:

"I do not know him. No doubt he belongs to the Duc d'Orléans. They told me that he had lent us some of his people for this evening."

It was flattering. It seems I had the bearing of a lackey from a good house!

The first two hours of the promenade were pointless enough. Conversation was proceeding at several points at once, but remained within the bounds of quiet intimacy. They were talking in low tones, and now and then a smothered laugh or the sound of a sentimental discussion served to break the

monotony of the scene. I, among the servants, who out of respect almost all kept silence, began to grow weary of this sameness, which threatened more and more to become gloomy, when the fanfares and the shouts of the huntsmen afar in the forest very opportunely brought to our ears the liveliest and merriest melody. It was a concert of invisible instruments, to which the forest echoes responded lovingly, and the sounds of it, borne on the breeze, made the branches rustle and the leaves whisper, and the birds of the night call, as if they had been suddenly awakened. At the sound our little cavalcade broke up and dispersed in several detachments, each taking the path that lay before it.

Madame de Lesdiguières, more active and bolder than the rest, penetrated alone into a broad alley better illumined than others by the first rays of the moon, calling aloud that she would go to meet the hunters, even if she had to take part in their feats and lend them a helping hand upon occasion.

M. de Biran clapped both spurs into his horse so as to come up with her before M. de Rambouillet. But the latter deceived his rival by a clever feint, and by making his horse jump the ditch of the sidewalk, rendered himself master of the situation. When Madame de Lesdiguières saw them both rise up like phantoms on her left and on her right, she could not refrain from saying to them :

" Well, gentlemen, have you sworn to retain me

without pity in the net of your gallant protestations? I shall come to think of you as the two doors of my prison. I beg you not to be harsher to me than to a butterfly or a bird . . . leave my flight free!"

"We cannot allow you to be found alone in the forest at such an hour," said Biran.

"We are fulfilling a duty," added Rambouillet.

"Ah, yes . . . duty! . . . That is another fine tyranny invented by men, who often talk of independence, and show the greatest ingenuity in finding means how they may be slaves."

"The slavery we seek with you," replied Rambouillet, gallantly, "is ten thousand times better than freedom."

"The whole court is enslaved to you," added Biran, "as you know."

"Nay," replied Madame de Lesdiguières, almost seriously, "my pretensions have no such scope as that. I do not seek to exercise a tyranny upon anyone; but I would allow no one to exercise tyranny upon me."

"Oh, oh!" said Biran, in an incredulous tone.

"You do not believe it?"

"We hesitate," said Rambouillet, "to attribute to you that coldness and apathy of the sentiments which nothing in nature warrants."

"Whence I am to conclude," replied Madame de Lesdiguières, with comical gravity, "that if the

reproach were well founded, I should be in your eyes . . . an exception . . . a prodigy . . . nay, who knows ? . . . a monstrosity perhaps ! "

" Undoubtedly," said M. de Biran in the same tone; "but if we are to tell you frankly, we have every reason to believe that this strong and valorous soul of yours becomes more human in solitude, when prying glances are absent."

" What do you mean ? "

" I share his opinion," resumed M. de Rambouillet eagerly, " and we must add as our justification that we are not alone in thinking thus. . . . With my own ears I have heard your heart which affects so proud an indifference accused at court of being secretly haunted by a passion that is known to none, whose happy object no one has been able to name, a passion that guards it, so to say, from all assault . . . "

" Indeed ? . . . And by what symptoms have these penetrating observers, who must be mighty fine heart doctors, discerned the existence of the malady ? "

" By your melancholy, which has been remarked upon a hundred times during the last months . . . . by the weariness that pursues you everywhere . . . by the continual desire for change which makes you move so frequently from one residence to another . . . in a word, by a thousand scarce perceptible signs that I cannot enumerate . . . though they are as plain as day."

"Has M. de Biran perceived as much?"

"Yes, Madame, like everybody . . . neither more . . . nor less . . ."

"I was far from supposing," said Madame de Lesdiguières with feeling, "that I was so closely watched . . . but do you know, gentlemen, that such a system would prevent us poor women from being sad, or laughing, or sighing in your presence. By such a method our most innocent fancies might be interpreted to our disadvantage . . . and you do not understand that this tyranny frets us, vexes us, embarrasses us!"

"Oh, allow me," said Rambouillet.

"One word," added Biran.

"I will hear nothing more," interrupted Madame de Lesdiguières in a tone that was half gay and half grave, "and to escape finally from your persecutions, gentlemen, I shall take to flight; catch me if you can."

And she plunged into the thick of the forest at the top of her horse's speed, he being one of the finest and strongest I have ever seen. The beasts ridden by MM. de Biran and de Rambouillet were not nearly equal to the one which already had the start of them by its sudden and unexpected rush; so they shortened their pace at last, wearied and bewildered by the many turns and twists of the clever horsewoman, and gave up a pursuit which they saw would lead to nothing.

"She's as uncertain as she is coquettish," murmured M. de Biran in a tone that expressed his mortification.

"A feather-brain!" remarked M. de Rambouillet. "Perhaps she will reflect if we leave her. If you take my advice, *cher ami*, we shall return to our other ladies."

"That is my view . . . but it would be well, out of curiosity, to send someone after her to put her in the way again. Here, huntsman," he added, addressing me, "are your beast's legs sound?"

"Thoroughly, Monseigneur."

"Well, follow the road ahead of you, try to find Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières, and bring her to the rendezvous."

I had no need of such a mouthful of orders; I started at top speed in the direction they showed me, and disappeared from their sight.

It was a long time before I could discover the trace that I was so ardently seeking . . . for a moment I thought I had lost it completely . . .

On a sudden a terrible neighing resounded in my ears; I caught a mingled sound of horse's hoofs striking upon stones and of a low outcry coming half-stifled from one oppressed by terror. The sounds redoubled . . . I pushed ahead, and saw the duchess coming towards me bending over her horse, whose mane she had seized, breathless, bewildered, crying for help in a heartrending and broken voice! A vast

ravine gaped open like a funnel at the end of the road that her runaway horse had taken . . . a few seconds more, a few paces more, and she would be killed . . .!

I sprang to earth . . . I so ran that I might come sidewise upon the road at the moment the horse passed, and at the risk of being broken to pieces and killed on the spot, I seized the bridle and clung to it with all my might.

The frightened beast dragged me the space of forty paces. But yielding at last to the violent pressure of the bit, on which I threw my whole weight, he stopped . . . and Madame de Lesdiguières was able to sink to the ground.

I arose, stiff and shaken, and tied the horse to a branch.

The duchess had already recovered from her fright; nothing but a slight pallor upon the cheeks, which were usually freshly rosy, bore witness to the terrible danger she had just escaped.

"The name," she asked, approaching me, "the name of him who has saved me?"

"What does the name matter to you, Madame? So long as you know it not, you can thank him whom you deign to say has saved you. If you knew it, he perhaps would have to ask pardon."

"Who are you?" she asked anxiously.

"I am . . . I am Roquelaure."

She made no movement, and uttered not a syllable.

So both of us remained in face of one another, awaiting perchance some sign to rescue us from this cruel situation . . . she was generous; it was she who took the first step towards me, stretching out her hand to me.

How many kisses did I not impress upon it! I could not weary of pressing to my lips those fingers whose very warmth was my handiwork, for but for me the chill of death would have suddenly frozen them. . . As she did not resist my caresses, I used and abused the silent permission accorded me.

"You will think me mad," I cried in the height of my frenzy, "but at the risk of bringing upon myself yet harder epithets than those with which you once overwhelmed me, my voice must utter to you the cry of my heart: I love you, I love you, I love you!"

She showed neither displeasure nor anger, but merely said to me gently:

"Be calm, I pray you, I believe in your love, and should be happy to respond to it; but that is impossible for me . . . it is quite impossible."

And as she uttered the words there was a strange vibration in her voice. She continued, pressing my hand:

"Will you refuse my friendship?"

"Refuse it! I, who would accept death from you!"

"Can I count upon your friendship?"

"Remember to-night, Madame la Duchesse, and require no more."

"Yes, you are right . . . and I can trust your

friendship now. Well, will you allow me to put it to the test to-morrow?"

"At once."

"No, to-morrow . . . come in the evening, about nine o'clock . . . I shall await you at my house; perhaps I shall have a great service to ask of you."

I shall never forget our charming walk afoot from the scene of the occurrence to Count de L***'s château, whither the hunting party had not yet returned. She entered alone, and I quietly disappeared. Two hours afterwards, when I had been on tiptoe to learn what happened afterwards, I heard that a groom had been sent into the wood to find the horse we had left there, for we had seen that his leg was hurt. As for my beast, I had paid no heed to him at the moment of peril, and he had returned to his place in the stables. These circumstances gave occasion to many interpretations, each one droller than the last. They said that Madame de Lesdiguières owed it only to her own skill that she had escaped from danger, and her reputation as a horsewoman was enhanced. The fact that one of the horses had returned without its rider added a fantastic gloss to the tale, which made it the more welcome. It was evident that the huntsman who had ridden the beast, and who would never be seen again, was a supernatural being who had transformed himself into a wild animal or been carried away by the devil. The worthy servant who had lent me my livery alone knew the truth; but he was discreet—a rare quality with his kind—and the secret was well kept. . . .

On the following evening when the clocks of Paris were striking nine, I called upon the Duchess, and was announced.

She was alone, and never had she appeared to me more beautiful; she thanked me for my punctuality, and began to talk of commonplace matters. Urged by curiosity, I besought her to leave me in suspense no longer, but to tell me without more delay what she asked of my zeal and devotion.

"Then I beg you to grant me your attention," she said, drawing her chair nearer to mine, so that she could rest her elbows upon the table between us; "you yourself may judge of the importance of the avowal I am about to make to you, for I must tell you that it concerns more than my life—my honour. I place my honour under the safeguard of yours, Monsieur de Roquelaure. Am I not right in choosing you from all the rest to receive my secret? And you will not betray it?"

What answer could I make? None. She understood as much, and said in passionate tones that reached my heart, as if they had been the icy point of a dagger:

"I love a gentleman of the court, Monsieur de Roquelaure, and I have loved him silently and in my secret thoughts for more than six months. I have reason to think this gentleman loves me in return, but the coldness I have ever affected towards him might at length be adopted by him against me. I think he is avoiding me, that I shall become in-

different to him, and am on the point of losing him . . . I have exhausted all my strength in the struggle . . . I can do no more . . . I want him to return to me, to know that I am unhappy, to know that I love him . . ."

"Why do you not tell him so?" cried I with an aversion that I could not hide.

"I should die of shame."

"Write to him, Madame la Duchesse."

"I have thought of that . . . but you do not know me, Monsieur de Roquelaure. My character is a strange mingling of childish fears and headlong rashness. I have taken pen in hand a hundred times, and as often the pen has fallen from my grasp without having traced a single word. A letter is overwhelming evidence against a woman; treachery, negligence, or some unforeseen mischance may bring it within the power of a husband, or a babbler, or an enemy! . . . Handwriting, even if it be disguised, is always recognised . . . if only you would, Monsieur de Roquelaure . . ."

"What, Madame?"

"You do not understand me?"

"Indeed, I dare not."

"It is only this . . . a few lines written to my dictation."

"To the man who has won your love? . . . Oh, Madame!"

"So the great friendship you offered me just now shrinks from a sacrifice?"

"Yes, from such a sacrifice . . . and I do not even understand. . ."

"How I could ask it of you, I suppose?"

"You have guessed my thought."

"Then you do not understand that I am asking of you the noblest and loftiest sacrifice by which I could prove your friendship . . . you do not understand the trust of a woman who, weak and without defence, comes to you and says: 'I have a secret on which my happiness—my happiness and my reputation depend, a secret that I have avowed to no one in this world, and I make you the keeper and warder of it with no other warranty but your honour.' You do not understand that in acting thus I abandon myself to you as much as to him whom I love . . . Ah, Monsieur de Roquelaure, I thought to have found a different heart in you."

My breast seemed weighted with sobs scarcely to be repressed. But I restrained them with an effort, and snatching up a pen that seemed to have been laid ready for me, I murmured in a scarce audible voice:

"I should be a traitor if, after receiving the beginning of such a confidence, I did not demand its completion. The sacrifice shall be thorough. Dictate to me, Madame la Duchesse, and I will write."

She sat supporting her head upon both her hands, while I made myself completely ready to act as her private secretary.

Then she uttered these two words in an unsteady voice :

"*Mon ami . . .*"

I could not repress a deep sigh, and at length brought myself to repeat the words so as to encourage her to brave the obstacles to this difficult piece of business—"*Mon ami !*"

The Duchess resumed with a fuller confidence :

"The time has come to show you the secret of my heart. For nearly a year I have met your devotion with a severity which my position imposed upon me as a law. Alas for us poor women ! . . . do not our most praiseworthy resolves fade away ? Everything conspires against us ; and though our courage be well nigh invincible when the enemy stands before us, yet at the sight of real grief or genuine despair it abandons us. When we succeed in our defence, 'tis not so much our virtue that aids us as a conviction, true or false, that we are not loved. That, *mon ami . . .*"

I stopped once more . . . she resumed with a certain gentle persistency :

"That, *mon ami*, is the real and sincere explanation of my long hesitation with you. I felt assured—was it my fault ?—that you did not love me. Now I think the reverse. Am I in error ? Oh, then may Heaven leave me at least my illusion, for I feel that I cannot live without it. Now I have but to give you conclusive proof of the love I no longer seek to conceal from you. You know that my husband has been absent a fortnight at Grand-Mesnil, and that he will not leave the country till the end of the month. So until then I shall be quite alone ; 'tis as much as to say yours as you will."

"No, no," cried I, casting the pen away, "I will write no more."

"Oh," she answered, with an angelic gentleness, "but you are bound to go on to the end."

Once again I took up my pen, for I was subdued to her in spite of myself, and she continued:

"To-morrow evening at nine o'clock I shall be at my house. I think I may be so sure of holding the chief place in your thoughts that I need not sign my name. Neither your heart nor your thoughts will find it hard to recognise me. Farewell! *mon ami* . . . till to-morrow."

I was overcome, my brain whirled, and my limbs were as lead. She took the letter from me, folded it, wrote the address upon it herself in a very small hand, and then enclosed it in an envelope, which she sealed in three places with green wax. While this was doing, I had no power of my senses, I was burning as in a fever, and I leaned against the furniture as a blind man might have done, moving to one piece after another as if I thus sought my way out.

"This is not all," said she.

"Ah," said I with a stupefied air, "there is something more?"

"I must know if you agree to take this letter to its address?"

"Myself?"

"Yourself."

"In person?"

"Yes . . . but with all possible mystery."

"Very well . . . give me the name, Madame la Duchesse, the name!"

"You see that it is hidden beneath the envelope . . . may I claim a new promise from you?"

"Am I not your friend?" I replied with a bitter smile.

"Well, make a vow to me that you will not open that letter till to-morrow . . . precisely at midday."

"I make the vow!"

"Remember that I am entirely committed to your loyalty."

"I shall not forget it."

"Farewell, Monsieur de Roquelaure!"

"Farewell!"

I went down the stairs sometimes stumbling against the balusters, sometimes against the wall. I was more dead than alive, and I started to walk in the streets at haphazard, not clearly knowing whither I went.

CHAPTER XXXII

A walk by night in the streets of Paris—Charamande, *porte-parasol* to Cardinal de Richelieu—A way of killing time—A night with Ninon—Masquerades—M. de Segrais, *Mademoiselle's* poet—The page of Henry II.—A saraband—M. de Segrais enamoured—A singular taste—Is it a girl or is it a boy?—M. de Segrais takes his chance—Boldness rewarded—Mademoiselle Desoeuillets—A madrigal in a plate—M. de Rambouillet's joke—Piquet between M. de Choiseul and Bautru—Luck—M. de Larochefoucauld intervenes—A new kind of bet—How Bautru won five hundred louis from M. de Larochefoucauld—I try to forget my troubles in sleep—The stroke of noon—A pleasant surprise.

I was so perturbed after my interview with Madame de Lesdiguières that I could not make up my mind to go home like a quiet citizen. I wandered for a long time about the streets, along the quays, and around the Tuileries, with no clear object, but merely intending to reflect upon what had just happened. But I had to stop somewhere; and I know not whither chance or opportunity might have carried me, if I had not met Charamande, formerly *porte-parasol* to Cardinal de Richelieu, whom I had not seen for nearly three years, and he, perceiving me as he passed in his carriage, cried out to me in his shrill voice at the turning of the Pont-Neuf.

"Roquelaure," said he, "whither are you going?"

"Where the devil may be pleased to lead me," I answered, "and I think he knows but little more about it than I do myself."

"Are you going to Ninon's?"

"What are they doing there to-night."

"Do you not know?"

"No, on my honour."

"Why, then, have you come out of the Bastille, that you do not know that to-day, the seventh of September, between eleven and twelve, there is to be supper, dancing, a masquerade, and a play at the Marais?"

"Charamande, my friend, I have not come from the Bastille, but from a prison a hundred times more grievous and relentless, whence I think I shall never emerge into freedom. . . ."

A heavy sigh completed this avowal, and Charamande exclaimed:

"The devil! It seems a serious case, and it must be treated. You are a fine dancer, Roquelaure, so come . . . I will have you to dance the first saraband with Ninon."

Though I was little disposed to divert myself in noisy pleasures, yet I made him press me no further, but took my place in Charamande's coach. We came to Ninon's close upon midnight. The fête was really magnificent, and some charming costumes were to be seen there. The fair Liance, the most exquisite

adornment of the ballets of that time, was dressed as an *hour*, and her attire drew all gazes to her. Some others, whose names were scarcely known, were conspicuous either by their beauty or by the richness and taste of their fancy dress; but none could compare with the mistress of the house. Ninon de Lenclos, surrounded by women, was like a goddess escorted by nymphs, or like the sun amid a constellation. Her face was like a splendid star, whereby all others were absorbed and brought to insignificance.

Who would imagine it? I was sad and well-nigh weary amidst this joyous rout, and the merry sound of it did not even divert me from my misery. Madame de Lesdiguières' last words were dinning in my ears, and they held my imagination prisoner in an enchanted circle whence it could not escape. The Bastille, as I had said a little while before to Charamande, was nothing to that prison.

A singular adventure happened to M. de Segrais during the evening. He was seated in a corner of the salon, and he had fixed a silent attention upon a charming little page, whose costume, marvellously well cut to the mode of Henry II.'s time, displayed an elegant shape and a perfectly well-set form. He had a fine grey hat with a grey feather turned down over the ear, a sword with a white sheath, and a ruff of the most precious point de Venise lace. His graceful and pleasing manner drew all the women around him. Some of them had even tried to remove the black

satin mask which hid his face. But he had resisted all these provocations, and to the great disappointment of Châtillon and Rambouillet, who had come to offer their hands to Ninon for a saraband, the page won the favour that was refused to them. Then murmurs could be heard here and there. But what was to be done against a mere child? Henry II.'s page was indebted to his seeming weakness for feeling secure amid a triumph that aroused so much jealousy.

M. de Segrais did not take his eyes off the group of dancers. When the violins ceased playing, he made his way to the page, whispered a few words in his ear, then in spite of some slight resistance, made no scruple to take his arm. Two minutes later he took him off into the next room and began a very animated and mysterious conversation. The bonny page's disappearance was soon remarked upon, and M. de Segrais was sought out in the little room whither he had retired to talk more freely with his new friend.

Thereupon war in due form was declared against Mademoiselle's poet. He was accused of insidious conduct, and of seeking his pleasure at the cost of others. The women asserted that in carrying off the little page he was stealing an admirer from them; the men told M. de Segrais that his conduct was an offence against the entire sex.

Segrais received the attack like a veteran and a man of wit. When the uproar had subsided, he replied:

"The reproaches you address to me from all sides are well-grounded if this page is really what he appears to be; but though I have not been able yet to get from him any clear assurance about what I am so interested in knowing, I declare myself his cavalier at all risks, and at my peril avow for him all the attachment, all the affection . . . to cut it short . . . all the love of which he is worthy."

"'Tis going a long way," said Ninon.

"Why so . . . if 'tis after all a girl?"

"But if 'tis a boy?" said Charamande.

"Beware, 'tis a boy," repeated all the men at once.

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Let him be what he will, I take my chance," replied Segrais.

"But it's horrible," cried the women, choking with laughter.

"The matter is the more serious," said I in my turn, "that M. de Segrais' word is his bond, and that he is not a man to recoil at anything."

"Monsieur de Roquelaure is right; and though I were reduced to the *rôle* of the shepherd Corydon sighing in vain, I should take Virgil as my excuse, and I should perform my part."

Hereupon there was an outburst of laughter and a cross-fire of jests with a more or less veiled intention.

"Such a scandal here," said Ninon, affecting a stern dignity; "I will not allow it. Pretty page of Henry II., I command you to take off your mask."

"Willingly," said a little honey-sweet voice, "besides, I am beginning to find it hot, and I am eager to reward M. de Segrais for having guessed what I am alone among you all."

The mask fell, and disclosed the freshest face that can be imagined. An abundance of fine hair, held captive till then under a light felt hat, spread in silky wreaths over the shoulders and to the waist of the enchanting girl. There was a murmur of admiration around her, and Ninon, surprised at having been deceived like the others, said, as she ran up to embrace her:

"My child . . . how I congratulate you. Yours is a pretty age. Only at sixteen can you be a pretty woman and yet be like a man . . . two summers more, and there will be no more mistaking. Gentlemen," she continued, now addressing the male part of the company more especially, "I commend my little friend to you; you will see her first appearance some evening at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in one of the pieces of our excellent Corneille or of old Rotrou. She is Mademoiselle Desoeuillets."

Though she had not yet been seen at the theatre, Mademoiselle Desoeuillets had one of those early reputations which grow round little marvels before their appearance on the world's stage. We thronged

around her, and pledged ourselves to be present in a body at her first appearance, which in fact took place a little while afterwards, and happily fulfilled all expectations.

Assured that his prize was a woman, and more, a most charming one, M. de Segrais carried the joke through to the end, and thought it amusing, while everyone else was convinced about the little page's sex, to take his turn at expressing doubts, though the matter seemed sufficiently proved, to judge by experiences. He followed Mademoiselle Desoeuillets all the night, affecting incredulity, and begging her to find some means of proving the truth to him more convincingly. However, he did not carry this sport beyond the bounds of a measured gallantry, and she was the first to laugh at it. They say, however, that the intrigue thus lightly begun, on the very next day suddenly became a serious affair. However that may be, it is none the less true that M. de Segrais had been really wrought upon; this may be judged by the sudden whipping-up of his steed Pegasus, whose pace was slow enough as a rule, and who suddenly took the bit between his teeth that night.

While we were taking our places for supper, and Mademoiselle Desoeuillets was repairing the disorder of her hair as best she could, the author of *Athis*, armed with a pencil, improvised the following madrigal on the bottom of his plate.

For so sluggish a versifier as M. de Segrais, this achievement was a real proof of love :

You, Phyllis, are a man, I vow;
Your conquests are unbounded now.
What, would you reign in every part?
And rule the male and female heart?

Our sex, brought captive to your knees,
Is but a half of what can please;
For all must worship. How can I
Love's nets in such confusion ply?

My passion thus torments me, grieves me,
Yet nothing of the pain relieves me.
Raw am I, clumsy, crude and coy;
How can I ever love a boy!

The verses were certainly not wonderful; but, like all women who assume the part of the Muses, Mademoiselle Desoeuillets was no less susceptible to the pride of having inspired them, and no one could help heartily applauding M. de Rambouillet when, having received the plate from the poet's hand to present it to the girl, he said, with a bow:

"This, Mademoiselle, is from M. de Segrais, who sends you a dish of his own confection."

Before withdrawing I carried a *reconnaissance* as far as the card-room. The first party to which chance led me was composed of men only, and was divided into two distinct camps, where they were playing gleek on one side and piquet on the other. Just as I entered, one of the gentlemen at gleek was pocketing a windfall of a thousand ducats. As I knew no one among them, I made my way towards the other table, hoping to be luckier there. And there in fact

were several of my friends looking on, while one of the players was Bautru, who was as deep in the cards as a priest in his breviary, and his opponent I soon recognised as the Comte de Choiseul, who appeared to be playing at random, as it often appears when luck is on a man's side.

The explanation they gave me confirmed my forecast; Bautru was losing a round sum, while M. de Choiseul had won ten hands at piquet in three-quarters of an hour. As for the latter, I must do him the justice of saying that he was tired of such a run of luck, and annoyed at it, and would have been well enough pleased to lose a time or two. Scarcely had I turned my eyes upon the green cloth, when I saw him throw down his cards, while he said:

"I am playing for ten . . . and here is thirty, my dear Bautru, and you have not scored a point."

"Well, the upshot is I am out, and the loser, and beaten again. . . . By your leave, Monsieur le Comte, I now owe you five hundred louis."

"Do you take your revenge?"

"Why not? Double or quits."

"You mean it?"

"Assuredly."

"You are wrong in persisting, Bautru," said M. de Choiseul. "My fingers tell me that I am going to have more from you."

"Let us see! . . . I have so much confidence in

this round that I am almost inclined to add the six louis I have left to my stake."

"It would be madness . . ."

"I shall risk it."

"Gentlemen," cried M. de Choiseul, addressing those about him, "you are the witnesses that if Bautru ruins himself he will have himself to blame. The thousand louis will go the same way, I promise you."

"Oh, oh! that's to be seen," said Bautru, shuffling the cards with grotesque energy.

"If I were the government," said a voice that I had not yet heard in the conversation, rising from the back of a neighbouring group, "I should prohibit certain persons from play, and certainly M. de Bautru would be included in the prohibition."

Some of those present cried out upon these words, which had been uttered by M. de Larochefoucauld.

"Yes, gentlemen," said M. de Larochefoucauld, drawing near, "and I maintain that my resolve would have an excellent effect. There are some sorts of men who ought to keep from cards as they would from fire; you have no idea of the disasters, both little and great, which may ensue from this passion when it is carried beyond bounds. In a moment of overwhelming misfortune, the ablest general may forget his plan of battle, the tenderest lover the lady of his thoughts, and the merriest man of wit his pleasant vivacity. There is no need to say, my

dear Bautru, that the last allusion is addressed to you."

"I thank Monsieur le Duc cordially," replied Bautru. "'Tis true that they give me, I know not wherefore, a reputation for ready wit, which often proves the heaviest and most difficult burden to carry that I know. No matter, let it be deserved or not, a man must earn his reputation . . . so I would give a great deal to be able to prove forthwith and on the spot to the Duke, that in spite of the many kicks with which fortune has favoured me during the last hour, I still have my mind clear enough and as free from gloomy fumes as if I had just slept or dined well. . . ."

"You might be put to a hard proof," said the Duke, smiling.

"Well," said Bautru, "I accept it without knowing it."

M. de Larochefoucauld reflected for some moments and resumed:

"Well, I will give you a fair chance, and I will not take you up without warning; I am going to join in the game, but shall take not the least notice of the cards. What are the stakes?"

"Five hundred and odd louis."

"Good . . . if you win, all is for the best, for the test will be postponed to another time . . . but . . . you may lose. . . ."

"Nothing is impossible," said Bautru.

"Well, in that case I suggest a means whereby you should not pay M. de Choiseul yourself."

"Then who would pay him?"

"I should."

"Let us see the means."

"'Tis just simply a bet. Now listen, gentlemen. There is no living soul that M. de Bautru yields to for the quickness of his answers. All the same I will wager that when he sees he has lost his hand, he will not be cool enough to pass a jest."

"And if he passes one?" asked the Comte de Choiseul.

"I guarantee his wager to you."

"Do you take the bet?" asked Châtillon.

"You cannot ask the question seriously, for I can only be the gainer," said Bautru; "but who is to decide if it is a jest?"

"Everybody," said M. de Larochefoucauld, "and you shall be the first, Bautru, for you are a good judge of these matters."

"To risk so great a loss without a chance of gain!" murmured the gambler, with signs of anxiety. "You are very sure you will win?"

"I do not say that."

"H'm, h'm," said Bautru, who seemed undecided, "here is a mighty to do . . . to find a droll, sharp, witty saying . . . at the very moment of catastrophe . . . the fact is . . ."

"The fact is," interrupted M. de Larochefoucauld, "I defy you to do it."

"Well," said Bautru with a sigh, "let us see."

The round was begun and the most profound silence was preserved by the onlookers. The buzzing of a fly could have been heard distinctly.

The first hand, which was of decisive importance, was fatal to Bautru.

The second the same.

At the third there was a slight gleam of hope.

At the fourth M. de Choiseul, who was first, took up splendid cards. He had already marked ninety-one. He threw a five to the ace on the table and said:

"Five!"

"Five!" cried Bautru. "I never thought it was so late. I must go back to my wife. *Au revoir*, gentlemen!"

He made a pretence of leaving us, while we all roared with laughter, and M. de Larochefoucauld drew the five hundred louis from his pocket and handed them to M. de Choiseul.

I came back to my own house, tired enough, about six o'clock in the morning, and as a result I dozed, if I did not sleep, till midday, the fatal time which was to reveal to me the man I was to hate so bitterly.

Twelve struck. I tore asunder the envelope, and nearly lost my balance with joy and surprise. The name . . . was mine!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

What happened to me at a performance of *Eurydice* — The Chevalier de Ponceville—His insolence—A challenge—A meeting behind the Innocents—A farcical duel—How M. de Ponceville made me travel—One foot in the cemetery—A jest in lieu of a thrust—A last word about the Duchesse de Lesdiguières—The true and lamentable history of the Baroness de Préverenge—Sketch of her husband—Genealogist and huntsman—What a man may learn while he is quietly walking among the hills—Pierre Gibaut the spy—A trafficker in secrets—How De Préverenge paid for the services of his majordomo—The abyss—The Chevalier de Puy-Robert—The obliging husband—A genial repast—Tragi-comedy—Singular imagination of a husband in extremities—A mistress shared—A favour valued at two hundred ducats—A lover shown out—Between husband and wife—The refinement of vengeance.

A FEW days later I was concerned in a slight adventure which I may narrate here.

It was at a representation of *Eurydice*, one of the many Italian operas which successfully tried their fortunes in France under the especial patronage of Cardinal Mazarin. I was not to be with Madame de Lesdiguières till nine in the evening (it will be remembered that this was her time), and not knowing whither to go, in my impatient mood, I betook myself at last to the theatre. I took my seat in

a box where at first I was alone, but I was quickly joined there by an old man whom I did not know, but I soon entered into conversation with him.

The next box was occupied by a certain Chevalier de Ponceville, a man ill-received, but a great braggart in words, whom I had seen once or twice at the receptions of M. d'Orléans. I think he was soliciting at that time the command of a regiment of light horse, but had not as yet been able to obtain it. I believe, too, that he was somewhat lacking both in ancestry and means. With him were two women who were very well known for their pretensions to be women of acquirements, and were called Mesdames d'Ambert and de Laverdac. It was as much as Ponceville could do to hold his own in such good company, and and it was easy to see that he was trying to play the hero. He had several times affected to find fault when I was applauding, and to express his displeasure upon the top of my approval. In vain I told him in an undertone that he was wrong to put himself forward so, and that furthermore the music of *Eurydice* was as pleasing as any that had yet been heard in Paris.

I know not what bee he had in his bonnet . . . but he cried :

" Egad, Monsieur de Roquelaure, where music is concerned, 'tis well known you are but a poor creature."

I felt an eager longing to throw Ponceville's hat

out of the box or flick him in the face in sight of everybody. But I had the good sense to control this impulse, which would have caused a scandal, and I said to him, low enough to avoid the attention of the audience, but loud enough to be heard by Mesdames d'Ambert and de Laverdac, who were seated in front of us:

"Monsieur de Ponceville is extremely kind to make that courteous distinction in speaking of me as man and musician. 'Tis more than I can do for him."

Ponceville turned very pale, for he was as cowardly as he was insolent. He began tugging at his ruffles to have something to do, and tore the lace of one of them, while he turned upon me a glance that was meant to be scornful, but fear took the place of impertinence in spite of his efforts; he muttered:

"Egad, my friend, there is a deal of words!"

"They are the change for your money."

"So we are quits?"

"Not at all. The account must be verified, and that is a transaction which cannot be finished here."

"As you please. It will be light to-morrow," he replied, much less jauntily. "To-morrow, on the meadows!"

"Faugh!" replied I, becoming insolent in turn, "poor creatures of my stamp do not wait till the next day. The moon is full to-night. We will see to it at once . . . behind les Innocents."

"Agreed."

The two women were thorough and frank coquettes, and their pride was secretly flattered by the turn the dispute was taking, for it was in some degree brought about by them; but they thought it correct to give way to slight signs of fright, in which, with a little goodwill, we might discern their feelings of solicitude. They even made a show of detaining us, and one of them inhaled her salts violently, as if she had been upon the point of fainting. As that kind of swoon is not dangerous, neither of us paid attention to it; but we asked M. de Guise, who was in the next box, to be escort to the two sympathetic ladies, whose minds were very little troubled about our fate in reality, as I fancy, and we left the theatre without more words.

The thing was to be done quickly, so we took as seconds the two first gentlemen we met. Ponceville caught sight of the Chevalier de Miraumont, who was taking the air in the street, went up to him without more ado, and told him in a couple of words what service he sought of him. Miraumont made no difficulties; only he asked us to wait a minute or two, as he was waiting for the Marquis de Nesle, who had left him for a moment.

"It could not be better," I said to Miraumont. "You will be for Ponceville, and the Marquis will not decline to act for me."

M. de Nesle soon made his appearance, and we all four moved off in the direction of the Innocents.

I talked with my second the whole way. As for my opponent, he said never a word, and I plainly saw that Miraumont, whose reputation as a man of courage had been long established, and who knew his man as well, would have been glad to make him chatter a little. No man likes to feel ashamed of those he backs, and, in truth, Ponceville had the air of a calf being led to the slaughter.

There was the finest moonlight when we reached the end of our walk, and it was no exaggeration to say that it was as bright as day. It was arranged the fight should be on the ground abutting on the cemetery, and, waiving any further preparation, I drew. Ponceville did the same, and our two seconds, in accordance with usage, took their places at some distance from us, with drawn blades, and then we crossed swords. . . .

If this duel had been like others, I should assuredly not have taken the trouble to give the details here; but it afforded so droll a sight, that I cannot resist the wish to give my readers an idea of it. It is quite true that Ponceville fought in the strict sense of the word. I must even add that he did not hold his sword so badly, and made some passes now and then which lacked neither elegance nor vigour. But he continually gave ground, so that at the end of five minutes we had traversed, principals and seconds alike, a distance of ten toises.

We might have gone a long way at this rate, and

I for my part saw no reason why an end should come. However, out of curiosity, and for the novelty of the thing, I let him take his course, and continued to press him.

Up to this time he had given way in the open, but by dint of covering space he reached the charnel-house of the Innocents at last, which was enclosed here and there by wretched rubble walls and quick-set hedges. Ponceville, without even seeming to perceive what he did, retreated upon one of these latter, and there he was with one foot upon the public way and the other within the burying-ground.

Hereupon I myself gave ground by a full pace, and lowered my weapon in spite of myself:

"Deuce on it, Monsieur le Chevalier, is it not enough to call me a poor creature? Do you take me now for a sexton, and do you think I am inclined to bury you myself?"

This sally took the place of a lunge; a man does not fight when he is laughing, and in spite of the gravity of their functions, our seconds could not keep their countenance. Miraumont had no more inclination to travel round the world under the poor pretext of seeing us fence than had M. de Nesle; so he was first in urging Ponceville to make excuses to me. That was just what Ponceville wished, but he pretended to hesitate.

"You have gone so far already," added Miraumont, "that one step further will not cost you much."

"The more so," added De Nesle in an undertone, "that it will be his first advance."

The matter was certainly turning to a jest; so we were reconciled and prepared to return to the town. For my part, I was not sorry to be rid of my worthy friends, for I had such a night in view as made me giddy and dazzled with the mere prospect of it . . .

But enough! For the time the fair Madame de Lesdiguières has made another man of me, and in spite of myself I feel compelled to discretion and reserve. Besides, I am jealous of that bygone happiness, and just as then I would have defended it against a thousand rivals together, so now I am resolved to keep the memory of it for myself alone.

How great a pity that circumstances, whereof the reader will be apprised later, prevented that happiness from lasting more than eighteen months!

I shall take advantage of the fact that I have spoken of M. de Ponceville to insert here a story about one of his relatives, Madame Diane de Préverenge, who was the victim of a very strange misadventure in Dauphiné. When she was very young, she had been married to a very grave man—far too grave for her—who passed the greater part of his days in hunting, because he disliked talking, and the greater part of his nights in researches into genealogy, which, however, never saw the light.

Matters went passably well for the first two or three years. But the young lady, who had a quick

perception and a lively wit, and was not allowed to go to Grenoble as often as she desired, grew weary at length of the recital of her husband's great prowess afield, and of the tedious repetitions with which he vexed her when he thought he had made some discovery such as would interest his neighbours. Remember, too, that he often let weeks go by without speaking a word to her; and this may give you an idea of his negligence as a husband. He had made up his mind to put the entire genealogy of the families of the Dauphiné on a new footing, and it will be understood that this tremendous piece of work made him surly and intolerable at times. Love and learning, it is notorious, have never been good comrades. The noble gentleman had already completed half his labours, and was losing his appetite over his work, when an event, which he would gladly have dispensed with, threw his ideas into confusion and upset the peaceful monotony of his life, hitherto continually occupied in the same round and bounded by the same outlook. Happily, his heart was like steel, and his head like brass, so that he could have endured even doughtier blows than that which he received. Here is the matter in brief:

One evening, after he had bagged some small game and was returning to his château, situated on the heights of Domène, in sight of the splendid vale of Graisivaudan, the Baron de Préverenge saw one of his house-servants coming towards him; this was

a kind of majordomo whom he had always disliked, and had several times threatened to deliver to the authorities for breaches of trust, and especially on the occasion of a crime that had been committed in that part some time before. The majordomo had even been arrested at first, and then released for want of evidence against him.

Pierre Gibaut (as this man was called) took off his hat respectfully when he beheld his lord and master, but at the same time he stopped short in front of him, as if he purposed to bar the way.

"What are you doing here," asked M. de Préverenge, coming to a standstill, "and who gave you leave to quit the house in my absence?"

"Nobody. . . . Monsieur le Baron, nobody."

"And how is it you dare to avow as much to my face?"

"I think I may hope, Monsieur le Baron, that you will excuse me."

"You have something to tell me?"

"Oh, assuredly, Monsieur le Baron, something very urgent."

"Well, speak."

"Not here, Monsieur le Baron, we are too near to the house, and they say that in this country the trees have tongues just as much as the walls have ears. So, if it be convenient to you, we will move a little further off."

Préverenge was not a man to feel fear, but Pierre

Gibaut's mysterious manner impressed his mind, and he turned back almost against his will to re-enter the mountain gorge whence he had emerged. The place where they then were was one of the wildest in the countryside. Two walls of rock, hewn in the hillside, rose to right and left to a great height, so that an artificial darkness resulted, as if night had really fallen; but this was not so, for the light of a fine sunset was still illumining the snows of the summits above them. Each moment the Baron made signs of halting, but Pierre Gibaut, who seemed to fear being spied upon or overheard, very keenly beckoned his master on, and begged him to proceed a little further.

At last our two personages reached a kind of natural bridge which had no doubt been cast during some convulsion of the earth across a torrent, the waters of which fell from a vast height and foamed noisily, passing innumerable obstacles in the course of a thousand windings, and were lost to sight at length in depths that the eye could scarcely explore.

"Will Monsieur le Baron be pleased to stop here?" asked Pierre Gibaut in a tone that clearly showed he had found the place he was seeking.

"Maître Pierre is very kind to be contented," replied Préverenge, with ironical deference. "I almost thought we should go up to the glacier."

"Nay, but hear me, Monsieur le Baron; what I have done is more for you than for me, since, by

your leave, it is your dinner and not mine that is getting burned."

"Pierre Gibaut," answered the Baron with vexation, "you will be good enough to leave parables upon one side, for I neither relish nor understand them. Be brief, if you can."

"Why, yes, Monsieur le Baron, yes. I will begin, if you please, by putting a little question to you. Do you ever remember that you are married?"

"You are insolent," said the Baron, raising his arm.

"Nay, never be angry; it is not my purpose to give you offence . . . but it might really be said sometimes that you forget; do you see?"

"How so?"

"Judge for yourself. In the morning, as soon as you are out of bed, you make a visit of ceremony to Madame . . . a matter of five minutes, no more nor less. You wish her good-day and she wishes you good-day—all very well. Great folk call that being married, and 'tis their concern. . . . Then comes breakfast. Nothing much is said, that's easy to understand; we must eat to live. But others in your place, with a belly full, would think of a little love-making. But you, Monsieur le Baron, have the saddle put on your big black horse, unless you are going after the small game, as you have done to-day. After that, you take your firearms, your bag and your hunting-knife, and away you go. . . .

There you are, out of the house. Observe that 'tis every day the same, In truth, it could scarce be different if Madame did not exist."

"Has Maître Pierre changed from an untrustworthy servant to a father confessor? And has he invited me to hear a discourse, a lecture, or a sermon?"

"It is a history, Monsieur le Baron, and a true one, as I will vouch. But to return to what I was saying. There you are, in the middle of the forest, sometimes surrounded by a double pack of hounds and a body of huntsmen, and sometimes alone, as to-day. The day passes and the evening comes on, and then it is dinner-time. You come back perhaps, perhaps not, it depends upon the sport you have had. If you are pleased, you come to table . . . and you eat with the appetite of four, they say . . . but if not, you do not appear. You send to say that you are unwell. . . . Let others believe that; I am not gulled by it. . . . 'Tis anger and mortification that have deadened your hunger. All hunters are like that."

"Upon my honour," said Préverenge, leaning upon the oak paling which abutted upon the abyss, "I was altogether wrong to show anger just now. Do you know, Maître Pierre, that you are beginning to amuse me admirably? Proceed, proceed . . . you have made a good commencement."

"I shall make a yet better ending," replied Pierre

Gibaut with a sly laugh, which, however, he tried to conceal from the Baron's notice. "Where was I? Ah! I know. . . . So Madame is often obliged to dine alone, as if she were an old maid, or a recluse, or a widow. By Saint Peter! who is my patron saint, let me tell you, Monsieur le Baron, that this is not a very fine life for a châtelaine, and Madame la Baronne might soon take exception to it. . . ."

"So," said Préverenge in a low tone, while he bit his lips in a fury that he coldly restrained, "it seems you concern yourself with my married life."

"Certainly I do," replied Pierre Gibaut with an air of candour, "and it seems to me that Monsieur le Baron can scarcely find fault with me for that, because I have come to tell him a thing about his married life that he little suspects."

"How? What thing? Will you say what you mean?"

"Be not angered, Monsieur le Baron, in Heaven's name be not angered, for presently you will need an angel's patience and a martyr's resignation. You know the Chevalier de Puy-Robert well?"

"Yes."

"A handsome young man who dwells a league from here?"

"Of course."

"And you greet him every time you meet him on the road?"

"Yes . . . do you not hear? . . . What follows?"

"Well, Monsieur le Baron, Pierre Gibaut has a word of advice to give you; when you meet the handsome Chevalier de Puy-Robert on the road, do not greet him."

"And . . . why not . . . Maître Pierre?"

"Why? . . . Because when he sees you he passes by the gate of the Château de Préverenge without stopping, but when he knows you are away . . ."

"He goes in perhaps?"

"'Tis as you say."

While Pierre had been speaking the Baron had incessantly observed him with a deep scrutiny. He seemed to be guessing the secret of this confused revelation little by little. But at the last word he drew himself up to his full height, and seemed about to give vent to a cry. However, he repressed that display of feeling; for it would have been imprudent from his point of view, and resumed with a fine show of apparent calm:

"And if he comes in, what does that prove?"

"Oh, certainly it proves nothing . . . especially if you suppose he stops at the courtyard . . . Unfortunately the entrance-hall is not far off, and he hurries into it . . . the staircase tempts him and he ascends it. . . . Chance will have it almost always that Madame la Baronne's door is half-open . . . he glides in, the windows are shut, and then . . ."

"Silence, wretch! I bid you be silent," cried Préverenge, now beside himself. "But no, I bid you

own to me that you have lied . . . even if the Baronne de Préverenge had fallen to this depth of shame, she would have self-respect enough not to make an exhibition of herself to her waiting-women and her lackeys. . . ."

"You are right, and there is no living soul who is in the secret of what I have just told you . . . Madame la Baronne compromising herself under the eyes of the household! Never. . . . She never receives his visits but after midnight, and not a soul in your house, not even yourself, has ever suspected it."

"I marvel at your perspicacity, Maître Pierre, for how comes it that you have seen what nobody has seen?"

"Oh, 'tis very different in my case," replied Pierre Gibaut, trying to decipher from the Baron's face what effect his words would produce; "I have been watching Madame la Baronne for three months . . ."

"Worthy of an honest servant," said Préverenge, whose features displayed a concentrated passion; "but are you quite sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Mistaken! Oh, impossible, Monsieur le Baron . . ."

"But still . . ."

"It was I who used to open the gate to Monsieur le Chevalier de Puy-Robert."

If at that moment an observer could have studied the diverse emotions that Préverenge's face betrayed, he would have been at once astonished and alarmed at the violence of the inward conflict which they

revealed. But Pierre Gibaut remained impassive, and did not even seem to understand the import of what he said. Doubtless the Baron, who knew the character of his servant, mistrusted this marvellous composure, for he once more restrained the impulses of his fury, and resumed, in an agitated voice:

"It is time, Maître Pierre, that you explain yourself more plainly. I do not think you mean to dare me to my face—you know that is a game wherein I should have the advantage of you—so I must suppose you have some good reason such as will justify you."

"Oh, but one reason, Monsieur le Baron; I wished to be very sure of my facts, and to prevent anyone else from sharing such an important secret with me. . . . I succeeded, and I alone know of your wife's amour, my good seigneur . . ."

"And like a devoted servant," said Préverenge, with admirably sustained self-possession, "you have come to deliver the secret to me, that I may take advantage of it, I suppose?"

"No, indeed . . . I have come to sell it to you, because I reckon you will give me a good price for it."

The Baron's face suddenly underwent a change. Why? Man's feeble intelligence would seek in vain to penetrate these singular mysteries. However, from this moment Préverenge seemed to have made up his mind, and to have resolved to listen calmly to the strange sallies of his servant. With close attention,

his hearer might even have discerned a smile lurking about his lips. His answer was in accord with the fresh attitude which he had just adopted.

"I have always regarded you, in spite of your peccadilloes, as a valuable servant and a clever man. You have proved to me, Maître Pierre, that my eyes can see. Come, tell me your conditions. The service that you have just rendered me is great, it is very great; there is nothing I would not do to recompense you worthily."

"My conditions," replied Pierre Gibaut, with a careless air, "are no more than two; not excessive, eh? You remember, I think, that six months ago they found a murdered man in the Préverenge valley? It was said he was a wealthy traveller, who had been robbed, and they insulted me by arresting me, Pierre Gibaut, a good Catholic who might have extreme unction, I swear it, without confessing to the priest. You took some part in that, Monsieur le Baron; for you were summoned to the assize at Grenoble to give information about your servant, and you showed him no too great kindness, and it is not your fault if he escaped hanging; for you told the judge who had charge of the business that I had lately bought a little freehold in the Vale d'Allevard, and may I perish, said you, if I know with what money he paid for it. They let me go, from lack of evidence; but thanks to you, I might have lost my life over it. Say what you will, your evidence has always gone strongly against

me. Here, Monsieur le Baron, is a retractation of your evidence in due form, you have only got to sign it."

"Egad," said the Baron, "here is a pretty trifle. You should understand, my dear Pierre, that I think no more of such a retractation than of a feather. I will give you a hundred of them, if you like. I said then what I thought to be the truth, but the law decided that you were as white as snow. I certainly will not refuse you this declaration you ask of me; but 'tis in reality too slight a matter. Let me hear the second condition."

"Oh, that is simpler still. My little property at Allevard is all in pieces, and Maillard the mason, who has seen it, says it will take ten thousand livres to put it in repair."

"Your mason is a thief . . . but no matter. Ten thousand livres! why, what is that compared with what you have done for me? You shall have the ten thousand livres, Pierre. But have you thought of the shortest possible way of getting your money?"

"I should be a great fool if I had forgotten that; but you may be easy, Monsieur le Baron, I have a level head. Here is a little deed duly drawn up which I hope to present to-morrow to your steward at Saint-Martin; he always has ready money. See, you have only to sign here."

Préverenge signed the paper slowly and resumed, while he affected to scan the two documents:

"Is this all you wish, Pierre?"

"Why, Monsieur le Baron. . . ."

"Oh, do not be afraid, I shall not think this enough, and I shall value your discretion as I ought. But to come back to the chief business; I want you, while we are returning to the château, to give me some further details."

"Willingly," said Maître Pierre, pocketing the two documents, which in his eyes represented untold treasure.

It was a bad road. Préverenge, absorbed in meditations which the majordomo thought he understood, walked with so uncertain and irregular a gait that the servant found himself, as if by chance, in front of his master. The Baron addressed a question to him now and then, and Pierre Gibaut replied to him with perfect composure. In this way they came to a very narrow path at so steep a slope as made it necessary for both to take unusual precaution. The Baron, who was in the questioning mood, resumed as if he had been following up a settled idea:

"So you say, Pierre, that no one at the château has noticed the Chevalier's attentions?"

"Not a soul, Monsieur le Baron."

"And have not you in a moment of forgetfulness, or when your tongue was itching—and I should be the first to overlook the fault—have you not told some neighbour first your suspicions and then your certainty?"

"A fool might have done that in my place . . . but I come from a country where they don't exchange pearls for fish-shells. Such a secret, Monsieur le Baron, is a kind of fortune; it is not to be shared."

"So," said the Baron, his voice shaking in spite of his efforts to speak calmly," "you are the only man in the world who knows of the Baroness de Préverenge's shame and of her husband's dishonour?"

"The only man," said Pierre with composure.

"And I can rely upon your discretion, eh, my worthy Pierre?"

"Oh, you are a suspicious man," said the major-domo; "I almost guessed that that would be the last of your questions."

"And you guessed right," cried Préverenge in a stentorian voice; "it is the last!"

As he uttered the words, the Baron seized Pierre by the nape of the neck, and bending him back in the vigorous grasp of his fingers, which held him like a collar of iron, he swung him round twice or thrice in such wise as to stop his breath, and then hurled him far into the abyss, so that after striking against the edges of the rocks he was engulfed in the seething waters of the torrent. The fall of the body was inaudible; for the perpetual noise of the watercourse deadened the brief sound, just as a clap of thunder covers the roaring of a storm.

Préverenge's feelings after the deed were not such

as might be supposed. His need of a cruel, instant, and terrible revenge, combined with the necessity of ridding himself of the sole witness of his dishonour, made him disregard the almost futile crime he had just committed. Besides, he was so habituated to the chase, and that is as much as to say so accustomed to slaying, that he had lost much of his sensibility about death. He excelled in the noble woodland sport. The bear and the chamois were his constant adversaries, and the skill with which he levelled at the one could only be compared to the quiet energy he showed in cutting up the other. He had been known to tackle the wild boar at close quarters, and the hunger-maddened wolf. A wild beast's loud cries of menace left him as unmoved as did the pitiful outcry of the deer at bay. So he merely looked on the killing of Pierre Gibaut as a kind of feat . . . and considered that for the first time in his life he had tried his hand at man-hunting.

So he went on his way again, hastening his pace. Pierre Gibaut was far from his thoughts, which were busied about the Baroness de Préverenge and the Chevalier de Puy-Robert.

"If I could find them together," he whispered to himself, "it would save me the trouble of thinking. I should kill them."

Préverenge gratified his fancy for a long time with this notion. He pictured to himself his wife

begging for mercy, while he coldly bade her address herself to Heaven. And he imagined the Chevalier trying to sell his life dearly, but dying at last in fearful agony. The picture lived and moved before the Baron's gleaming eyes. He smiled at it.

However, he did not return immediately. He walked around the Château de Préverenge for awhile, hoping that he might see M. de Puy-Robert enter there, or learn, from some casual indication, that he was already with the Baroness. But nothing happened to relieve his impatience, and he had the trouble of his espial for his pains. Then he made his way to his wife's apartments, and in such a frame of mind as would fit him to be at once accuser, judge, and executioner. Strangest of circumstances! The doors were nearly all open, and those that were closed, here and there, had the keys standing in the locks. These visible tokens of confidence or of crass imprudence upset all the Baron's expectations. He entered the tabernacle of the domestic gods, or, in simpler words, the bedroom, stealthily, and he was yet more astonished. The Baroness, stretched upon a bed as white as snow, lay in an easy attitude, and slept the innocent, pure, and quiet sleep which is the prerogative, they say, of the righteous man, the virgin, and the aged. Thus beheld, she was very charming. He gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then withdrew.

As he crossed the courtyard to reach the wing

in which he dwelt, he met several of his servants, who, having failed to see him enter, were full of excuses that they had not attended upon him.

"That matters not," said Préverenge carelessly, "and I am not displeased with you about it. But tell Pierre Gibaut to come and speak with me."

"Pierre Gibaut went out after dinner," answered one of the lackeys, "and we have not seen him since."

"Ah! I know how it is," replied the Baron, with the gesture of one who remembers something. "I learned for certain to-day that the poor fellow had nothing to do with the miserable affair last year in the Valley de Préverenge, and I signed a declaration for him in good form retracting the evidence I gave against him at the time. And further, I gave him, by way of indemnity, a good ten thousand livres, which one of my stewards was to pay him. No doubt he was impatient, and would not wait till to-morrow, so as to go before the law authorities at Grenoble first and draw his money afterwards. Our good Pierre Gibaut was always in a hurry. . . . I hope no misfortune will befall him by the way. . . . I should be really sorry."

When he had delivered this funeral speech, Préverenge shut himself in his own apartments, and began to meditate what he should do. The night brought counsel. He was sorry that he had acted too sharply with Pierre, and was glad that he had not been obliged to execute upon his wife the vengeance

which for awhile he had so eagerly promised himself. He had never imagined that he could have been dragged down to the ridiculous position of a befooled husband, and a very natural effect of his surprise was the movement of anger to which the majordomo had fallen victim. But if the information proved true, he rightly felt that in these sorts of cases there is something as bad as the very misfortune itself, namely, the grievous publicity which is given to it. This was plainly the best course his thoughts could take, and it is due to him to say that he persisted in it. It will be seen how these prudent and cool resolves worked out in a few days.

A week elapsed, and Préverenge acquired complete proof that Pierre Gibaut had not lied to him. Every other day, after midnight, a slight shadow might have been seen climbing the wall (the majordomo was no longer there to open the gate), and stealthily seeking the staircase that led to the Baroness's apartments. Thrice was the manœuvre renewed under Préverenge's eyes, and twice Préverenge contented himself with dropping the curtain before the window of his room and walking up and down in the courtyard, as if he had sought to spare his wife's lover all anxiety. It will be seen that his conduct showed delicacy, and that his fierce intentions were greatly altered.

But a great project was being thought out in his mind, and the fourth visit of Puy-Robert was fixed as the occasion for putting it in execution.

It was midnight, and the Chevalier, supposing the Baron deep in the dusty atmosphere of his heraldic researches, had made his way lightly and boldly to Madame de Préverenge's side, and hoped now as always for his hour of bliss. Both were full of confidence in that star which protects lovers, and already they were rejoicing in the good fortune which till now had preserved their union from all ruffling breezes, when an unusual sound, first heard in the court and then within the building, disturbed their happy security, and raised the first cloud on the horizon of their loves. They looked at each other and turned pale, and in their mutual glance flashed a terrible presentiment laden with despair and terror. . . . The Baroness, prompted by one of those instinctive warnings that great catastrophes give birth to, sought to fly to the adjoining room; Puy-Robert's hand sought his left side, forgetting that he had hung his sword in the window of the room by which he entered. But Préverenge left no time to his wife to flee nor to her lover to prepare his defence. He appeared on the threshold and advanced no further.

Madame de Préverenge stifled a scream and hid her face in her hands; the Chevalier, whiter than a winding-sheet, staggered to the mantelpiece trembling, and leaned against it for support.

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the Baron, whose features evinced a scarce credible composure. "Does my presence annoy you, Madame? Am I unwelcome, Chevalier?"

These questions were left unanswered. The lover neither recoiled nor advanced, and no sound issued from his lips; a pitiful groan escaped the Baroness. M. de Préverenge resumed in the same tones:

"Why, in sober truth, I do not understand you. . . . Either you are afraid of me, or I am very unwelcome to you, for neither dares look me in the face, and your reception of me resembles a dismissal in due form so strongly that I might well be mistaken over it. Come, am I one too many? Must I go? or shall I stay?"

"Sir," stammered the Baroness, "this hateful jesting . . ."

"Jesting! Why, who jests here? Not I, certainly. . . . I learned that Monsieur le Chevalier de Puy-Robert had come to keep you company, and I thought I had some right to make a third in the advantages of that rare favour; but I have no intention to sadden you . . . on the contrary, I have had an excellent supper prepared, and if you will allow me, we will all three share heartily in it. . . ."

"You make me shudder, sir," murmured the Baroness in a scarce audible voice.

"There is no occasion," said Préverenge lightly, "and the supper will set all right."

At a signal agreed upon, a splendidly-prepared table was brought in . . . places were laid for three.

"Here is your place," said Préverenge to the Chevalier de Puy-Robert. "Here is yours, my dear Diane. Allow me to take my seat between you."

The Chevalier, who up to the present had remained sunk in a kind of feverish stupor, shook off the torpor to which he had yielded, and cried in a voice that rang with repressed indignation:

"Enough, Monsieur le Baron, enough. . . . This comedy has gone too far. It may be that you have the right to kill your wife (that is a matter between God and you), but cease to torment her, for I will not see her thus tortured in my presence. Just now, impelled by a proper sentiment of penitence and shame, I regretted the wrong I have done you, and I was about to beg your pardon for it. . . . You relieve me of the humiliation, and make us once more equal by insulting me yourself. I thank you. I will render account of my misdeed at the same time that you render account of yours!"

The Baroness, standing with dishevelled hair, was gazing first at the sternly cold face of Préverenge, and then at the angry countenance of the Chevalier.

"What are you saying about insult and shame and repentance?" resumed the Baron with an admirably assumed air of surprise. "By your leave, Chevalier, I see no one here who is criminal or dishonoured. What harm is there in all this? You have come from time to time to pay your court to the châtelaine de Préverenge, and the busy tongues will have it that you are not always ill-received. Well, egad! Préverenge may be a bear, but he has done the like often enough in his youth, and knows well

what it is to make a raid on the lands of others. There is no keen sportsman who is not, now and then and on occasion, a poacher. . . . What you have done, Chevalier, is fair fighting, and you have my congratulations."

"Monsieur le Baron," resumed Puy-Robert, whose anger grew ever the higher, "you are in your own house, and on this ground you abuse the right you have against a man who has so grievously wronged you; but, once again, let us close the quarrel on the right field. If you seek blood, I am at your orders. Only, as you have lost your self-respect, let me recall you to the sense of it, and if not on my account, who can do no more here than offer a reason, then on account of this house, which is that of your ancestors, and on account of this lady, who, guilty as she may be, nevertheless bears your name, act rightly."

"Ah!" cried Préverenge, with a perfectly agreeable laugh, "I begin to understand your words a toise long and your infinite scruples, my dear neighbour. Heaven be praised, 'tis clear now. But be reassured. The mischief is not so irreparable as you think, and all can be set right."

"What do you mean?" said the Chevalier de Puy-Robert.

"Poor Diane," resumed the Baron, without answering Puy-Robert directly; "'tis a weakness I could never cure her of. Oh! we may do as we

please, but she will never change her tune . . . she will have it she is my wife, and gives out to all who will listen to it that we are married."

"And you are not!" cried Puy-Robert, gazing wildly at the Baroness, who made no more sign of moving than if she had been dead.

"No, indeed, thank God, Chevalier! My dear Diane has her liberty as I have mine, and our loves are birds of passage that can fly to right and left at the first threat of rain or the first ray of sunshine."

The Baroness opened her mouth as if to answer, but a sudden choking seemed to prevent her.

"I know, my fair Diane," resumed the Baron, "I know all you would say to me. I promised to be discreet, eh? And, zounds! I have not forgotten; but we must keep a fair account, if we can. Did not you promise me something else? and have you kept your word? If you had been faithful, I should have kept silence."

And to cut all further explanations short, Préverenge took his place at table, poured wine for the Chevalier, took a big draught of the same wine himself, no doubt to dispel a fear which would appear very natural in such a case, and made an appearance of supping heartily. The Chevalier, as may be imagined, merely touched his glass with the tips of his lips, and the Baroness looked on the scene with the dull and troubled eyes which the prisoner turns

upon the preparations for his execution. When Préverenge thought that the scene had lasted long enough, he rose and said:

"Chevalier, since the lady prefers you to me, I make no difficulty about her going with you. But I own to you that I am still captivated by her beauty, and I should regard a last night passed by her side as a favour of inestimable price. Be generous enough to yield me your place . . . you owe me the courtesy. As for you, Madame, you are not in a position to accord me the favour by good will, so I will buy it of you. This purse contains a hundred ducats in gold. . . . Is it enough . . . for one night?"

The Baroness de Préverenge cowered down and nearly fell to the floor. The gold was scattered on the bed-clothes. The Chevalier took a step forward to come to her aid, but the Baron, barring the way, grasped his arm tightly and led him to the door, saying:

"You have heard me, Monsieur le Chevalier, and I hope I have made the position exactly clear to you. If you have managed to convince our dear Diane of the reality of your affections, nothing will prevent her coming to you to-morrow at your house. I will offer to open the door for her, and it will rest solely with her if she quits the rustical Baron for the gay and elegant Chevalier. If you do not see her again, the reason will be that she despises you as heartily as, from this day forth, I shall despise her."

The Chevalier de Puy-Robert had no time to answer these last words, which were the only expressions of bitterness that had fallen from the Baron's lips, for at the same instant Préverenge threw wide the double door which led to the antechamber, and a double row of lackeys formed in order first to make way for, and then to escort with high honours, the guest of the Baron de Préverenge.

"Farewell, my dear neighbour," resumed the latter, loud enough to be heard by all his retinue. "Farewell!"

This being done, the Baron de Préverenge regained his wife's room slowly, double-locked the doors, and then threw wide one of the windows as if to breathe the air. There were heavy drops of sweat upon his forehead, and he wiped his face two or three times with his handkerchief; then he took his place in front of the hapless Diane, and looked her in the face without uttering a word.

Trembling and abashed under this gaze, which scrutinised the deepest recesses of her soul, the Baroness found strength to murmur, as she dragged herself to the feet of the man who seemed desirous to kill her:

"Monsieur, just now you threw mud at me . . . is it not enough? What do you seek now? Is it my life? Take it . . . slay me . . . but do not prolong my agony further!"

Préverenge drew some papers from his pocket and

perused their various headings. Then, after examining them all with unmoved tranquillity, he replied to the Baroness :

" What a hurry you are in to die, Madame ! But we must talk business first . . . all in due order, if you please ! "

CHAPTER XXXIV

Continuation and close of the history of the Baroness de Préverenge—Disquieting duration of my amour with Madame de Lesdiguières—The poet N***'s little adventure with Ninon de Lenclos—The persistent rhymester—Contest of gallantry—How Ninon received a quatrain by N***—Whereby it is shown that a poet is not easily discouraged—A fresh quatrain—Boldness rewarded—My visit to the convent of the Ursulines at Lectoure—An unexpected meeting—An old quarrel—A reconciliation—Mademoiselle Valérie de Rocheplate—Intrigues to fathom—Certain honest means of keeping a young lady out of her heritage.

THE Baroness's breath came thick and short. Préverenge's eyes flashed, and the menace of death seem mingled with grim raillery in his glance.

She resumed, trying to receive with a show of courage the death-blow which it seemed she could no longer escape:

"Whatever you do, sir, and whatever you may have to say to me, I know my fate. You mean to kill me!"

"I? Kill you?" replied Préverenge in a mocking tone. "You cannot really think it, Madame; I have done all in my power to escape from ridicule, and that would destroy the results of my efforts in a single minute. Kill you! Upon my soul, that would

be a rare way of adjusting my business. No, no, if you please, Madame, I shall not kill you, for if I did so, it might still be supposed I was amorous of you, and that is a belief I will let no one entertain; if I killed you, people would think of you as a victim, and I mean that no one shall pity you; if I killed you the Chevalier would think that you are my wife . . . !"

"Well, sir?"

"Well, you are so no longer."

While he spoke thus, Préverenge drew from his breast a parchment roll, which he unfolded before the Baroness's eyes. She perused it rapidly, and then fell back upon the bed trembling, livid, and with dishevelled locks.

"It is the first time in my life that I have had business with the Pope," continued Préverenge in the same tone, "and I must do His Holiness the justice of avowing that he has shown every goodwill to serve me. The Abbé Driencourt, my confessor . . . and yours also, I believe, took charge of the negotiations. A fortnight sufficed him to go to Rome, smooth away the difficulties of every kind that stood in the way of my wishes, and bring back this precious deed of nullity. The Abbé Driencourt is a very clever man. . . ."

"He has ruined me," murmured Madame de Préverenge.

"He has saved your life, for but for him both you and your lover would be dead by now."

The Baroness bowed her head and was silent. Then commenced a strange dumb-show. While the unhappy woman seemed sunk in her despair, the Baron brought her a travelling-dress with a head-dress and mantle to suit it. Unconsciously, so to speak, she donned them in silence, and awaited the orders of the man who was her master and yet no more than a stranger to her now, inexorably entrenched in his sovereign and absolute authority as a high and mighty seigneur. When she was ready to go, he offered her his arm and led her to the court-yard. There a carriage was awaiting her, surrounded by grooms with lighted torches in their hands, while the horses were pawing the ground in their impatience.

"I am not going to play the traitor with you," resumed Préverenge in a low tone. "I shall persuade this whole countryside of the truth of what I told the Chevalier de Puy-Robert. To-morrow everyone will learn that you were only my mistress. I have taken sure and unfailing means to that end. You may declare the contrary, if you like; I am not concerned about it; you will not be believed. And now I give you your choice between two places of retirement: my castle of Valneige, in Queyras, whence you can go to join your lover, and the convent of Notre Dame d'Embrun, where you will be at leisure to meditate upon your errors and dedicate your thoughts to God. From here the road to either

destination is almost the same . . . some fifteen hours at a good pace. . . . We shall be there about midday. Come, varlets," cried he to the outriders, "open the doors and aid Madame into the coach."

He was obeyed, and the Baroness seemed to act mechanically without even appearing aware of what he was making her do.

Préverenge took his seat beside her, and, after preserving silence for a moment, asked her in the tone of a man who thinks he has allowed time enough for reflection:

"Whither do we go?"

"To the convent."

On the following day Préverenge returned to the château, and resumed the accustomed courses of his life. Three days later he confided his version of the secret of his quarrel with Madame Diane to his butler, whom he knew for the most garrulous and indiscreet of all his servants. In twenty-four hours the news spread throughout the countryside, and was the theme for every kind of comment. Préverenge resumed his hunting and his researches as if he were the calmest and easiest-minded man in the two hemispheres. As his conduct appeared very honourable, when all was said and done, and as he was very rich, while compassion should be shown to every sin, the chief gentlemen of the neighbourhood gradually made advances to him, and threw the doors of their houses wide open to him when he thought well to visit them.

Préverenge soon saw the meaning of these welcomes. Most of these gentlemen had daughters, and most of the daughters were remarkable either for great beauty or handsome dowries. They say that men are not cured by experience. The maxim was justified in the Baron de Préverenge's case, for two months after the events which we have just related, he became enamoured of the daughter of Comte E * * * de la Tour-du-Pin, asked her hand in marriage, obtained his request, and married her with great pomp before the eyes of the world, in the choir of the church of Saint-Andrew at Grenoble. History does not record whether he related to his second wife the epic wherein his first wife had figured as the heroine, or if he ever felt inclined in fireside chat to recount the tale of his meeting with Pierre Gibaut. . . .

We may well doubt it.

But let us quit these sombre themes, and return to Paris, where we shall find the young king's court, the graces of the fairest duchesses, and the wit of the most distinguished and most elegant courtiers.

To speak of myself, since this is the point to which I have ever to return, I said in one of the last chapters that I was harnessed to the chariot of Madame de Lesdiguières. Six months, and then a year passed, and there was I still harnessed to the same shafts, happy in so sweet a burden, and with no thought of changing my load or of resting.

You may exclaim at so great a wonder—Roquelaure

caught in the snare! He who has so long joked at sentiment and laughed at love is now a captive in the pretty spider's-web woven of silk and gold! There is he trembling at the feet of the fair, sighing forth madrigals, dreaming in the moonlight, and in a word a lover . . . hopelessly entangled!

I frankly own that the thing began to make even me anxious.

But be reassured, dear reader, I shall not be so inimical to your pleasure as to set before you the details of my interminable amour; for these details, though they are very entertaining to him who plays his part and sings his music in that marvellous duet of passion, yet they would prove very insipid matter for one who is unconcerned, if it were sought to recount them to him at full length. There are plenty of other subjects to claim our attention; and in lieu of telling you about myself, I will attempt to distract you for the moment by the exact and faithful story, not of what I did during the continuance of my pastoral bliss, but of what I saw, and we shall not fall short of material, that I vouch; for though my heart was closed to all alien impressions, and the fair Madame de Lesdiguières alone occupied my thoughts, my eyes were indefatigable, and I kept them widely open, so that I observed curiously all the secret motives displayed in the comedy of human life which was daily enacted before me.

And first, dear reader, to enliven your spirits,

which the sad adventure of the Baroness de Préverenge has doubtless dashed, I will tell you a little story which cannot fail to cheer you, as the heroine is a woman of whom I have already made mention, one who embellished whatsoever she touched and added a fragrance wheresoever she passed—I mean the charming Ninon de Lenclos.

Here is the incident :

Ninon, whom everybody loved so much, and who returned the love so richly to a certain number, Ninon, whose soul was so gentle that she was ever more disposed to satisfy all her lovers than to reduce them to despair, sometimes passed the bounds of her becoming moderation if she was importuned beyond all measure. This is proved by what happened one day to the poet N * * *.

N * * * was a persistent rhymester, who made verse about everything and on every possible occasion. If you were walking with him and were so unlucky as to make mention of the moon, he made you a quatrain on the moon. If you wished him all prosperity, he acknowledged your good wishes in alexandrines. In him this habit was a disease, a fever, a mania. . . . Madame Cornuel said of him one day that, when they buried him, he would probably show he was not thoroughly dead by rising up again to write his epitaph.

Ninon was amused at first by his gallant messages, but she grew weary of them at last, and ended by

thoroughly disliking the poet on account of his rhymes. From that time forward the poor poet, as if it were not enough to be repulsed, became the butt of Ninon's jokes. In a word, he was the target for every witticism launched by the merry devotees of the goddess of the Marais.

And Heaven knows she had abundance of devotees!

But N * * * did not abandon his quest. *Impavidum feriebant ruinæ.* He was deluged with epigrams, pleasantries, and derisive laughter, his ears were never free from the disagreeable echo of them, but he persisted in pretending not to notice them.

Every morning when she rose, and every evening when she retired, Ninon received her little daily missive.

She recognised it by its perfume of violets or vanilla, and it sickened her.

But amidst all her reluctance and anger she was a woman still, that is to say, she was inquisitive.

She never failed to undo the envelope and read the verses.

Lucky was N * * *, for this was always so much in his favour.

This procedure had lasted for some time, and N * * *, warned by the bad reception he met with, no longer frequented her assemblies. . . . It was the time when Villarceaux reigned over the heart of our charming Aspasia, and she had not seen N * * * for

more than three months, when one evening, as night was falling, as she returned from some place or another with one of her serving-women, she saw at her door the hapless rejected suitor, who no doubt aspired to no more than seeing her himself unseen, and would then have gone away as he had come.

Ninon, usually so kind and considerate, might well have had some pity on the luckless mortal, and have allowed him so trifling a happiness. It is at once so easy and so pleasant to a pretty woman to let herself be admired. But Ninon, owing to one of those caprices which are only to be explained by the singularity of the feminine character, was naturally inclined to a harshness towards this suitor, which was little in accordance with her usual manner.

"What are you doing there?" she asked him severely.

"I await the rising of the sun," replied N***, with a gallantry worthy of Astræa.

"Monsieur N***," replied Ninon, whose state of nerves at the time was little favourable to insipid advances of this kind, "I have to warn you of one thing: if you still persist in sending me your poetry, in spite of my forbidding it . . ."

I will not give the conclusion of the sentence of Ninon de Lenclos in precise terms. The reader, if he wishes to form an idea of it, need only recall the piece which our excellent Molière brought out, in 1655, at the Petit-Bourbon Theatre, wherein we

see how Marinette, highly incensed with Gros-René, cries, alluding to his love-letters:

"Thy letters are not with me, but my ire
Shall soon consign each fragment to the fire."

Whereunto Gros-René very sensibly replies:

"And thine . . . thou know'st how I shall use them."

This, under another form, was all Ninon's reply.

N *** withdrew in a very humbled mood, and the fair adored one thought she had rid herself of her stubborn admirer for a long time.

But she had left love out of the reckoning.

That very evening, after supper, where she had been very merry, just as Ninon de Lenclos, dreaming of a thousand gracious things, and with her fancy full of images of delight, was getting into bed, her chamber-maid knocked at the door, and then came in.

"What is it?" asked Ninon.

"A letter, Madame."

"From whom?"

"Look."

She recognised the writing.

"Again!" she cried, frowning. "Well, withdraw—leave me."

This time Ninon was furious. After being so ill-treated, this devil of a fellow returned to the charge! She felt inclined to burn the letter without reading it, or else to return it to him insultingly, to show what heed she took of his pretensions. But

the daughter of Eve had the best of it in her, and the letter was opened. Here is what it contained:

"Hie! children of my genius, hie!
Endure the fate which I deplore;
But as you pass so very nigh,
Announce my presence just next door."

* * * * *

A week later, to the great astonishment of everybody, the poet N***, joyous and envied, was present at a very sumptuous *médianoche*, given by Ninon to celebrate her birthday, in her charming sanctuary in the Rue des Tournelles, at the Marais.

But it must not be concluded from this that Ninon ever accorded to the enamoured N*** what he so ardently desired. It is possible, but I cannot affirm it. All I can say is that from that time forth she admitted him to one of those frank and lasting friendships which were so eagerly disputed, and which she knew how to grant with so much tact and discernment.

* * * * *

About this time I was sent to the convent of the Ursulines at Lectoure, to treat with the lady superior of some settlement or other which had been pending several years between that community and M. le Prince de Conti. It was some question of estate and indemnity, and the prince had selected me to conclude it, because I had been indirectly concerned in the matter at the time of my mother's death.

A visit to a convent was a rare occasion in my life. I approached the building of the Ursulines not without a secret feeling, the nature of which I can scarcely define. Was it fear? Was it respect? Or was it merely a profane curiosity?

There was an endless ceremonial before I was conducted to the private room of the Mother Abbess.

I simply acquiesced, and kept my mouth shut.

At last I was announced.

The superior was seated in a very large ebony chair surmounted by a crucifix. She was very busy reading (some such book as a breviary, no doubt), and seemed absorbed in her meditations. But when my name was uttered, she started in her chair, and eagerly sought to cover her face with her veil.

Unhappily for her, the movement did not effect all that she intended, and in the superior of the Ursuline convent I discovered an old acquaintance, one who will not have been altogether forgotten, and whom I did not meet again without some perturbation—Madame de Montal!

"Take no alarm at my presence," said I, in the most respectful tones. "I have not come to interrupt you in your godly converse with Heaven. I am the representative of a great lord who has been so good as to intrust his interests to me, and not a single word from my lips shall recall that past wherein we should both encounter distressing memories."

"Monsieur le Duc," said the Abbess, in a tone of

emotion, "I thank you for your goodwill, and the accents in which you express them convinces me of their perfect sincerity. But I avow that when I heard your name, I could not repress a feeling for which I pray you to pardon me."

"Was it mistrust? Or was it fear?"

"Monsieur le Duc," replied Madame de Montal, "it was a painful feeling of confusion, such as prevented my raising my eyes to your face; but your language has completely reassured me, and now we can speak of the business which has brought you hither. You come, do you not, on behalf of M. de Conti?"

"Before approaching that subject, let us talk of ourselves a little, Madame . . ."

"Address me as *ma mère*," said the Abbess, blushing.

"Allow me to dispense with that, I pray you . . . the matter that I desire to treat of here is quite worldly, and that we may not confound matters of religion with the business of this world, I will ask you to be once more for a few instants the fair and witty Madame de Montal."

She made a gesture of assent.

"You agree? . . . I thank you. Well, Madame, tell me why, gratuitously, without being prompted by any discernible reason, you once inflicted an affront upon me before the whole society of Lectoure, by excluding me from an assembly to which you invited all my friends?"

"Did not you take a cruel revenge?" murmured Madame de Montal. . . "And must I remind you of that dreadful sacrilege against the confessional, whereby you surprised a sinner at the very bar of repentance?"

"I was wrong, and I committed an unpardonable crime, I know," answered I with compunction. "But if my pride had received so grievous a hurt, did you ever know, Madame, what a blow fell upon my heart when I listened to the strange confidences that you unconsciously made to me, both unwittingly and unwillingly?"

"I do not understand you."

"No one has ever known it, Madame, not even Latour-Roquelaure, though he shared nearly all my thoughts; you yourself would never have learned it, if a most strange chance had not brought us together at this moment. . . . After that scene at the confessional, Madame, I returned home, triumphant to all appearances, but in reality sad, dejected, and desperate; for you were lovely in my sight, and I loved you . . ."

The Abbess was so startled that she jumped back in her chair.

"Yes, but with as pure a love as that with which I might adore the angels . . . and I rejoiced in that virtue of yours, though it seemed to accuse my own weakness and show my unworthiness. . . I rejoiced in it because I told myself in secret that if you hated

me, there was no one else in the world whom you loved! . . . Those sweet illusions could not endure after the avowals you made to Father des Martelles, and scarcely had I committed my misdeed when God himself punished me for it by raising inextinguishable regret in my heart."

Madame de Montal remained silent and abashed.

"And you," I resumed, "in spite of the invitation which you thought fit to send me later, in spite of the reparation which was wrenched from you by an odious necessity, did you not hate me and despise me?"

Madame de Montal sighed, raised her eyes to heaven, and said to me:

"I think that you understand women, Monsieur le Duc, and yet I see that there are secrets in their nature of which you are still ignorant. You know not to what strange changes our firmest ideas are subject, and our strongest resolutions; you know not that with us there is scarcely any event that does not lead to a reaction, and that if hatred sometimes follows upon friendship, so does excessive indulgence sometimes take the place of excessive severity. So it was with me as concerned you, Monsieur le Duc. When once my first feeling of antagonism had passed away, when I had made a sacrifice to my own self-esteem which I judged necessary, I mean that of not receiving you because of your reputation . . . as a bad man, 'tis the phrase to use, I soon felt regret, for in reality I was curious, as all women are, and I wished to be

acquainted with you. When I saw you following me to the church, the glances which you directed at me, as you will remember, were such as both to move me and make me proud. It was a sin, and I have deeply repented of it since. Then at our second meeting, after you had taken the place of the venerable Father des Martelles in the confessional, I know not what I felt, but beneath the anger I showed there was so great a wonder and so deep a stupefaction, that I cannot say if I were more indignant or surprised at so blameworthy an act. When I returned home, I thought of all that had passed; of course I regretted an event which had subjected my modesty to such a rude experiment, and I shuddered at thinking that I had yielded my secret to a stranger and a man! . . . And yet after a few hours of reflection, these fears and regrets vanished; I cannot explain why I suddenly became prone to indulgence and forgiveness; but it is true that I had little difficulty in convincing myself that M. de Roquelaure, in spite of his levity, frivolity and zest for adventures, was none the less a gentleman of honour, from whom, in spite of the threats he had thought well to address to me in a moment of anger and resentment, I had nothing, nothing, to fear."

Madame de Montal had been so noble and so impressive in uttering these words, that I could not refrain from throwing myself at her feet.

"Rise," she said to me gently; "I am glad to

have seen you again, and I thank Heaven that those clouds are scattered which might have still arisen between us. . . . For the future, Monsieur le Duc, let us be friends."

She extended her hand to me, and I kissed it respectfully.

"Now," she resumed in a voice which I thought betrayed symptoms of tears, "let us speak of the business about which M. de Conti has sent you to me."

I could but obey; we compared figures, we upheld the respective rights of our clients, she defending those of her sisterhood, I those of the prince. But a harmless irregularity was soon introduced into this serious converse, and I have some doubt that a notary would have found many things to alter in the deed which we drew up of common accord. Nevertheless, we came to the end of our business when it had lasted about three hours. That, no doubt, was in some part attributable to the time that Madame de Montal and I had devoted to our reconciliation.

The day was beginning to wane. The abbess of the Ursulines bade me farewell, and I begged leave to kiss her hand a second time. She gave consent, and then, after showing me the way by which I should quit the place, she enjoined upon me not to forget her in my prayers, and returned to her oratory.

As for me, as will be seen, I was not yet within a great deal of leaving the convent of the Ursulines at Lectoure.

It was a day of adventures, and those days are like the runs of luck that sometimes come to you at games of chance. You know when they begin; but you never know when they will end.

I was withdrawing, and was passing down a long gallery which took me towards the garden, when, coming to a kind of parlour, I heard voices and steps near that door of the place which was the further from me. If I advanced, I should subject myself to a further demand for explanations and a fresh annoyance. There was a small chamber beside the room, which was at the moment half-open.

The surprise which ensued for me was of the most agreeable kind that can be imagined.

A girl of heavenly beauty was the first to appear. Behind her came a woman of about fifty years of age, of a harsh and hard appearance, with her hair in grizzled ringlets, a badly preserved old man, and an abbé of uncertain age. The last-mentioned was full of importance and was out of breath. He was exchanging looks of intelligence with the old lady, and interspersed these with smiles wherein was to be perceived that kind of treachery which, unhappily, is peculiar to certain men of God.

These four persons seated themselves in a circle, silently, deliberately, and their grave and solemn bearing was such as would have befitted inquisitors summoned to judge a heretic or a sorcerer. The girl seemed very indifferent to these imposing airs,

and looked silently at the cornices of the ceiling, like those idle scholars who come to a class resolved to pay no attention to what is told them.

The old man, upon a sign from the woman and the abbé, began the discourse, after a great deal of coughing, as is generally the practice with those about to commence upon a delicate and embarrassing question :

"Mademoiselle Marguerite-Valérie de Rochepiate," said he, "you have hitherto been deaf to all the exhortations of your family. . . . You are like a little rock, unmoved by the gentlest words and the wisest reasons. We shall see if you will prove more tractable here."

"Here? Where am I, then?" cried the pretty child, gazing around her with curiosity.

"At the convent of the Ursulines, niece," replied the old gentleman, who now had a fit of coughing yet more violent than the former access.

"A convent. . . . Oh, that is delightful, my dear uncle. If you knew how happy I was at the convent of Sainte-Mary at Cambrai, where I left so many charming and devoted friends!"

The abbé smiled.

"This convent is not altogether like the one of which you speak, Mademoiselle, and it is not likely that you will here find girls as careless and feather-brained as yourself. This is a house, niece, where life is spent in meditation, where eternal salvation

is thought of, and, in a word, where they pray to Heaven!"

"Why, uncle, I have never failed in that duty, night or morning! But it seems to me that any place will serve for that. . . . Why should I pray better here than in my father's house, the château de Rocheplate?"

"Nay, nay," interrupted the old woman impatiently, "my brother-in-law is right. There is no question here of your father, who is out of France, nor of his château, which will soon be his no longer. And even if he were here, it would be no sight to see a young lady of your rank beneath the same roof as a man of scarcely forty-two, who, since he was a widower, has piled folly upon folly. . . . It is six months since he left for Constantinople, and we have only heard twice from him, and in the second letter he tells us that he will probably not return for a year. We should not be surprised, now that he is in such a place, if he turned renegade from Christianity, and had himself made a pasha to kill time. Your father, whom I love because he is my brother," added the harsh old woman, "is a madman, whom we shall perhaps be obliged to place under an interdiction . . . and in that case you understand that it is our duty, our duty as kind and devoted relatives, to think of you, a poor neglected child, possessing unhappily so fair an exterior that it might become, if we were not watchful, the destruc-

tion of your soul and the cause of your perdition in the next world."

"Madame la Comtesse de Bois-Bertaut is right," said the old man, as if to round off the sounding periods of his sister-in-law.

The countess, tired by her piece of fine speaking, was solemnly wiping her forehead.

At the name of Bois-Bertaut I had pricked up my ears. Shortly before, La Tour-Roquelaure had told me of the plots that were being slyly hatched in that family. I beat my brains for facts, and almost at once I remembered that M. de Rocheplate had a vast fortune, that his admirable daughter, whose beauty and innocence were equally vaunted, was the sole heiress of it; but that his near kin, and first among them his sister, who had married a Bois-Bertaut, were taking advantage of certain follies he had committed, about which there had been some little scandal, and were secretly endeavouring to induce his daughter to enter a convent, and when she had taken the vows finally, they would obtain the interdiction of her father. In this ingenious way all the fortune of the Marquis de Rocheplate would be diverted in the natural course to the Bois-Bertaut branch, and the lovable child, thus sacrificed to a vile cupidity, would only have the satisfaction, a sad enough one at her age, and above all in the absence of a real vocation, that she might hope for salvation in the life to come, and that she would be espoused to God!

Are there many girls, young, fresh and of sound constitution, who are very eager for such a marriage? I do not think so.

Mademoiselle de Rocheplate, I fancy, shared my opinion.

Knowing the secret motives of the business, I guessed what the end was to be.

Madame de Bois-Bertaut, taking advantage of Rocheplate's absence, for the Marquis was in fact at Constantinople, was trying to cajole the charming Valérie, that she might bring her to renounce her rights by voluntarily accepting the religious prison which was pressed on her with so much insistence and with reasons more specious than sound.

The lady spoke a great deal more, while the abbé did nothing but breathe hard, and she concluded with these words, while the old Comte de Bois-Bertaut, her brother-in-law, leaning gravely on his cane, listened to her as silently and impassively as a counsellor at the Parlement, and Mademoiselle did her best to stifle her desire to yawn.

"So, Mademoiselle, the upshot is that it is your welfare that we have in view . . ."

I could not help smiling to myself at this *naïveté*.

"And to reach so satisfactory a result for you and for the whole family, we have but to bring you to this honoured house, where we have appointed to meet an eloquent person who will make you feel, better than we can, all the advantages and all the

good points of the decision we should like you to take. This person, who has persuaded many others more rebellious and more recalcitrant, and less educated than you, will not hesitate at anything that might show you your interests and put you in the best way to arrive at the double end we desire for you, that is, your personal happiness and your high repute in the world. My dear Valérie, do you here promise your uncle and me, in our presence, that you will in all respects attend to the teacher who will be here soon, with whom we shall leave you alone, so that you may collect your mind and inwardly receive the grace that he will certainly endeavour to bring from high heaven upon you ? "

" Yes, I promise," replied Valérie in such a tone of weariness as might be expected of one who seeks to end a tiresome discussion at any cost.

The abbé made a solemn sign of consent, and pointed to the door as if he would have Madame de Bois-Bertaut to understand that it was time to leave.

The old man rose; the abbé did the same. Madame de Bois-Bertaut solemnly kissed her niece upon the forehead, and said in just such an overbearing and imperious tone as captains of *mousquetaires* use in speaking to their companies :

" Let us go."

In going out they had to pass in front of the little room where I was concealed. . . . I heard the old gentleman say in a low tone :

" Why do not we wait for the bishop ? "

" His lordship bade me leave Valérie alone to her meditations for half an hour before he came. He is to be here at nine o'clock. It is now half-past eight, and so this is the very moment to withdraw."

She turned about again and repeated :

" Farewell, my dear child, farewell ! "

A moment later, this conspirator of high degree, with the old man and the abbé, who had played the respective parts of mute and accomplice, disappeared within the great stone corridor of the convent, the heavy door was closed behind them, and all I heard was the loud echo of their steps on the pavement of the galleries. I widened the opening through which I was looking into the parlour a little, and for a moment was rewarded by one of the most interesting sights that it has ever been given to a man to behold.

CHAPTER XXXV

I determine to oppose these disgraceful tricks—Serious results of the adventure—Flight, separation, hope destroyed—A journey into Switzerland—Whither romance can lead us—Siege of Bordeaux—I am wounded—State of affairs—The Fronde at bay—The journey from Reims—Intrigues of the Duke of Saint-Simon against me—I go to Reims as a simple amateur—The anointing of Louis XIV.—Appearance in the town of Reims—The holy ampulla—The coronation—The royal festivities—The cavalcade at Saint-Remy.

The lamps still burnt and threw a doubtful and trembling light on every object. These great walls, cold and naked, this bare table, with the common inkstand, these crucifixes of wood, these seats, the hardness of which revealed the severity of the discipline of the place, and to complete the picture, a handsome and dreamy-looking girl, her hair dressed in the latest fashion, and clad in the last style of the day—all this presented a curious, singular, and original picture, to which the principal character formed a most striking contrast.

In the first place, Mademoiselle Valérie seemed charmed to have no longer before her eyes the faces of the three personages whose physiognomy I have tried to sketch, but soon the complete soli-

tude, the mysterious solemnity of silence, the half-darkness which surrounded her, ended by agitating her so much that she was seized with a sort of convulsive trembling, and going towards the prie-dieu, she lifted her eyes to heaven:

"O God! O God! what do they want to do to me!"

It was evident that she had been kept up till now by a sentiment of defiance and hostility, which she had doubtless secretly cherished against the three relatives who had brought her here. But Nature now redemanded her rights, and the weakness of the young girl thoroughly betrayed itself.

My first idea was to fly to her assistance; my first movement was to rush towards her.

But a certain fear kept me back.

I should doubtless frighten her . . . she might scream for help, compromise herself, and me with her, and turn the peaceful convent topsy-turvy. . . .

What was to be decided on?

Ought I to resign myself to stand, virtuous, prudent, motionless, three paces from her, without daring to budge or say a word?

The punishment of Tantalus could not have been more hateful to me.

She remained several minutes upon her knees . . . then, slowly rising, she walked round the room as if to examine the furniture more closely; this furniture, as I have said, was very simple and severe.

She seemed a little more calm, almost comforted.

I coughed gently. She listened without seeming so very much frightened.

Delighted with this first success, I pushed the door open and presented myself to her eyes.

To my great surprise, she remained perfectly cool, and looked at me with an appearance of no other sentiment than a lively curiosity. I, thereupon, made her a low bow.

"It is probably you, sir, whose visit my aunt, the Marquise of Bois-Bertaut, announced."

The innocent girl suggested to me, unknown to herself, an excellent and luminous idea.

"'Tis I," I answered, in the gravest manner in the world.

"Can I know your name," she said, with a little hesitation.

"My name is——"

I hesitated for a moment.

Why lie to so beautiful an angel?

Her perfect candour had a right to a similar frankness on my part; besides an idea, which, prompt and rapid as a flash of lightning, at that moment entered my brain, leaving there the germ of a project which might determine my future and my life. I knew the name of this adorable child, I knew her family by reputation—it was one of the best of the noble families of Cambrésis. I saw her about to become the prey of barbarous relatives, who wished

to keep her, for their own profit, out of her paternal succession, and I resolved to become for her the protector from whom they tried to isolate her, in order to get the better of her conscience and her will.

Thoroughly decided to play the part of Providence, I added with assurance: "Men call me the Duc de Roquelaure."

Her countenance never changed. Evidently she heard my name for the first time in her life. That did not astonish me, seeing that I was certainly less known at young girls' nunneries than at the court.

"Mademoiselle," said I, suggesting that she should sit by me, "Madame the Countess of Bois-Bertaut, if I have thoroughly understood her intentions, has strongly advised you to intrust the care of your future to the person who will come this evening, and, with the intention of being useful to you, have a conversation with you in this parlour."

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc."

"And is your confidence in your aunt strong enough for you to consent, on her simple exhortation, to follow blindly the advice which this person, of whom you know nothing, should choose to give you?"

"My father is away, Duke, and the Countess of Bois-Bertaut, his sister, is my only relative in the world. You see, I am forced to do as she says; but I confess that her severe manner and her hard ways

have frightened me as to the result of this mysterious interview, which was forced on me by her, if my cousin, the Abbé de Louvigny, who is recently ordained, and of whom everyone in the family speaks well, had not secretly advised me to yield, on this occasion, to everything that was demanded of me."

"I know the reputation of the Abbé de Louvigny," answered I to handsome Valérie de Rocheplate, "and I know that he passes for being a man who is very pure, very honest, and who accomplishes with the greatest exactitude the duties of religion. But I cannot keep from thinking that he has almost trifled, not to say been imprudent, in telling you to submit to something of the nature and consequences of which he might be himself ignorant. Has he explained nothing to you."

"Oh, of course, of course!" cried the young lady, blushing deeply and with indiscreet vivacity.

"Has he named the person with whom you have to communicate?"

"No."

"Has he enlightened you as to what may be demanded of you?"

"Not precisely."

"What did he tell you?"

"He told me—he told me——"

"Come now, I *have* to know all about it."

"Well, Monsieur le Duc, he told me that the man in whom the care of my future would be placed

would have an angel's voice and the persuasive language of the saints; that he would advise me with the view of my eternal happiness; that nothing which had been taught me up to now in the convent had been of a nature to satisfy any of my desires; that he would reveal to me, poor ignorant girl that I am, the true state of the blessed in heaven; in one word, that he would teach me the delights of the only marriage which a Christian virgin is allowed to wish for in this world, that holy communion of souls," she added with fervour, "which gives to simple mortals a foretaste of the joys of Paradise!"

"So," said I, after a short pause, "you have made up your mind?"

"To listen to you, to follow your instructions, yes," replied the ardent neophyte, lowering her eyes and blushing divinely.

I held back a last hesitation which was in my mind, but almost immediately a determined, irrevocable resolution succeeded my indecision. Everything was clear. There were evident incontestable intrigues. They had determined to take advantage of the innocence of this young girl, in order to keep her out of her fortune and fling her on that path where consumption, despair and death perhaps awaited her. They had determined to bury her alive in this convent; it was to be her predestined tomb.

"No," said I to myself, "the wolf who has reserved this delicious prey for himself shall not enter here, the

bishop shall not accomplish his purpose. But first let me close the door and draw the bolt." The action followed the word, and I came back, and, taking Mademoiselle de Rocheplate by the hand, I led her to the little secret chamber where I had been previously hidden. I made her sit down, and fell on my knees before her.

"Why do you do that?" she stammered, looking at me in astonishmeut.

"I ask your pardon, dear Valérie, beforehand, for all I am going to tell you."

"All that is quite unnecessary; you have my aunt's authority for everything. My cousin, the Abbé de Louvigny, said that I might have every confidence in you."

"And they were both right," said I, "for I will save you from the evil which these wretches would have done you, and I will only use the power which has been given me to dissipate the clouds with which certain interested people wished to surround your mind. Dear child! have you ever loved?"

"Yes! oh, yes! I loved my father with all the force of my soul."

I breathed once more, for the first part of her answer had made me tremble.

"Have you ever felt a taste for the religious life?"

"Pray explain yourself."

"Have you ever wished to enter a religious house?"

"You mean . . . ?"

"To take the veil, to renounce for ever all the pleasures of this world, to shut yourself up for ever in a cloister."

"I—I had rather die!"

"'Tis well—I wanted to be assured as to that at first."

I looked at her silently. The word cloister had caused her to turn pale. She seemed ready to faint away.

"Reassure yourself," said I, "such a sad existence is not in store for you."

Then I pressed her lovely fingers to my lips.

"You frightened me when you talked to me of taking the veil," murmured Valérie. "But that will never be; you swear it to me?"

"Could such chains befit hands as sweet and white as yours, Valérie? Could eyes so beautiful, so brilliant, be doomed to be eternally fixed upon a hideous prison? Could so much beauty be hidden away without a crime? No, Valérie, that is impossible, that can never be!"

"You are pleased to say that to quiet me."

"And now, Valérie, that we understand that a future of suffering and of tears is not for you, shall I give you the key to your destiny?"

"To hear it from your mouth will be a double pleasure," cried Mademoiselle de Rocheplate, "because I now understand all the sympathy that they tried just now to inspire in me for you."

"Well, then, your destiny, Valérie, will be that of those whom you resemble. You are beautiful. . . . You will be fêted, admired, desired by all. . . . You are good, you will be loved . . . you are loved already. . . ."

"And by whom, pray?"

"By me, who will be, if it be your will, your first teacher in the art of happiness."

"Heavens! your words make me tremble . . . and yet I have no fear of you."

I rose and placed myself at her side. One of my arms slipped round her waist.

"Why do you press me so closely?" said she.

"The better to communicate my thoughts to you, Valérie."

"But your head is resting on my shoulder . . ."

"That is because I have many things to say, Valérie, secretly, quite low, in your ear."

"Nevertheless, you say nothing!"

"I dream! . . . Oh, drop off as I do, Valérie! There are dreams so seductive, so sweet!"

"But it is not by going to sleep that you will give me those lessons which my aunt had prepared me for."

"Perhaps! The sleep which I counsel you to is but the sleep of the soul; it is full of charming images and sweet fancies."

"But . . . Oh, Duke! . . ."

"Valérie . . . Valérie . . ."

"Holy Virgin! I feel your lips upon my cheek . . . you are kissing me? . . ."

"Imprudent girl! to thus reproach me; you have been obliged to turn towards me, and now your lips are touching mine. That is no fault of mine, I trust?"

"Nor of mine . . . I didn't do it on purpose," said Valérie, languishingly.

And her mouth as it stammered the words remained glued to mine. Her eyes shot forth long flames which burnt me like sun-rays. I gave it up; my hand slipped from her waist—the soft stuff of her skirt caused a sort of burning thrill to my whole being, and made my brain whirl. . . . I lost my head. . . .

* * * * *

Valérie, faithful to the instructions that had been so often repeated, gave full proofs of the most perfect submission, and I had the joy to hear her murmur in a feeble voice:

"Yes . . . this is happiness . . . this is true happiness."

An hour was passed in the charming gambols of this lesson; perhaps it was a little too philosophic for Mademoiselle de Rocheplate. It was time to fly; for how could we explain our manifest disorder? . . . I bade Valérie follow me, and she showed no more resistance to my will than she had done up to now. My coach awaited me at the door of the convent. The serving sister, who kept

the door, never dreaming that I was carrying off a novice, and noticing besides the lay dress of the young girl, allowed me to pass, making me a very respectful bow.

We were hardly rumbling over the stones of the high-road than his grace the bishop arrived at the convent. I kept my reflections to myself, and I answered Valérie, who asked me whither we were going:

"To one of my relations, where you can correspond with your family and write to your father."

I thereupon conducted Mademoiselle de Rocheplate to the house of the excellent Dowager de V***, whose name I do not set down here, because I know that during her life she had a horror of every sort of scandal, and that it would be contrary to her wish to be exhibited in Memoirs which some day or other may be printed. The good lady had given herself up to God. This statement will surely surprise some of my readers, who will not understand why I should, under such circumstances, have taken refuge under the protecting wing of religious ideas. But they will recover from their surprise when I state at the same time that my folly with the beautiful Valérie de Rocheplate was entirely free from any odious and culpable after-thought, that not even in thought had I quitted the sentiment of honour which caused me to regard as sacred the precious treasure of candour and innocence of which chance had

rendered me the possessor. In one word, I intended to make good the evil I had committed, and I should have looked upon myself as the most miserable of mankind if, even in the middle of the most delicious moments of my happiness, I had not cherished the formal intention of sanctifying everything by means of marriage.

For the first time in my life, in reality, the word marriage did not frighten me.

The good Madame de V***, to whom I only told—be it understood—a part of what had happened, took a great deal of trouble for me in the business. The abduction had caused some scandal. She it was who saw the Countess of Bois-Bertaut, Valérie's old uncle, and even the young abbé, who could not understand how the bishop's visit had been escaped. All these good people were very angry indeed. The trap they had set threatened to be fatal to themselves; they soon became more tractable, and agreed to a compromise. They wrote to Constantinople, whence Monsieur de Rocheplate replied, that as he was studying Mussulman customs, he was no longer much of a partisan of Christian marriages; but that, nevertheless, he did not think he ought to apply his new ideas to the establishment of his dear daughter, and that, consequently, he would approve in advance any decision of Madame de V***, all the more that the name of Roquelaure seemed to him in every way acceptable, etc., etc.

Everything, then, was happening for the best, when several incidents occurred which were enough to break off everything at the moment when they were least expected.

Good Madame de V*** died suddenly. Then Valérie's family, which had shown a brave face against misfortune, and which saw itself forced to yield to an unfavourable concatenation of circumstances, resolved to take a sudden revenge. The same day that they told me that my old relative had died during the previous night, they informed me that at about ten o'clock in the morning the Countess of Bois-Bertaut, having come to ask for Valérie, had begged her to come downstairs on the plea of speaking to her uncle, whose state of health prevented his going up to see her, and that then she had forced her to take the third place in a post-chaise, drawn by three horses, which immediately started off at a furious gallop.

I rushed about all day to obtain further details.

No one knew anything.

The following day I moved heaven and earth to discover the place of her retreat. It was impossible!

In their turn, they had carried her off.

At last, by researches, prayers, and flinging money about, I became certain that the unworthy Countess of Bois-Bertaut, fearing that I should play off against her the influence of certain powerful protectors, had crossed the frontier and taken Valérie with her to a foreign land.

Seven months passed in this way. I obtained no further news of the matter. I sent a long letter to Monsieur de Rocheplate. He never even acknowledged it.

I thought that perhaps the good man, having at last become a pasha, had at length gone out of his mind.

About this time my love-affair with Madame de Lesdiguières came to an end. I can say, besides, that this passion did not cease suddenly, but that it became extinguished by degrees, and that it was transformed into a real and tender friendship. Madame de Lesdiguières, I can affirm upon my word of honour, had no more devoted slave than me.

In order to finish at once with the history of Mademoiselle de Rocheplate, I will skip at a jump certain events that ought to find their place here, and go forward a whole year in my narrative.

An important affair having called me one day to Lucerne, I determined to profit by this circumstance to examine the neighbourhood, said to be both beautiful and curious.

It was in the month of July, and from the first hour of my arrival I arranged matters for this principal object of my journey. I had also to get a certain signature for the settlement of a territorial interest, and, the affair being transacted without difficulty, I found myself at liberty to do as I pleased with my time.

I commenced with an exploration of the country.

Lucerne is in a delicious position. The Reuss, which rushes from the beautiful Waldstœtten Lake, divides it into two portions; one is called the little and the other large town. The Swiss Alps, covered with their eternal mantle of snow, make an admirable frame, ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, which sparkle in every direction from the light of the sun, for the town.

I had already visited the Pont des Moulins, on which one notices Méglinger's pictures of the "Dance of Death" and the "Tour d'Eaux," which rises like a light-house above the Reuss; the arsenal, built close to the Berne Gate; and the abbey church, whose harmonious carillon I listened to with pleasure. It is easy to understand that I began to feel tired, when, on a sudden, passing along the left bank of the River Reuss, I perceived . . .

Who . . .?

Valérie . . . Valérie herself!

She was alone, and walked rapidly.

I ran to her, I called her; my heart beat with violence. She turned, gave a little scream, and grew very pale. I caught her in my arms, and some seconds after she said:

"Ah! duke, why did cruel Fortune separate us? You were very, very angry with me, were you not?"

"I! I angry with you, angel of goodness! Can you think it? I found out that you were carried

off by force from the house of the estimable Madame de V***; all I could do was to pity you."

"Oh, thanks! In my misfortune, my greatest fear was that you might have thought me an accomplice in that sudden and inexplicable flight."

"But why are you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you alone?"

"If you want me to answer all those questions," said Valérie, "come with me, I will conduct you, where we shall be at liberty to make mutual explanations, and to confide to each other those strange vicissitudes which have been impossible for us to struggle against."

I offered her my arm; she took it, and I accompanied her into a street which wound behind the church of St. Pierre. We shortly entered a smart-looking house, to which nothing was wanting but a little life and movement. It seemed a cloister, rendered comfortable according to modern requirements. She made me sit beside her, and, commencing at the death of the Dowager de V***, told me, without a single exception, the strange details of her abduction. Madame de Bois-Bertaut carried her off without giving her a chance of reflecting or of making any plan whatever, and, after five days' travelling, the pair arrived at Lucerne. There she was conducted to a convent, the rules of which were very severe. The abbess agreed to watch her strictly, and swore it by an oath on her eternal salvation; this appeared

to completely tranquillise Madame Bois-Bertaut. But Valérie (thanks to me, perhaps) was no longer a feeble lamb, who would allow herself to be conducted to her doom without a word. She determined to leave the convent, and one fine evening, having purchased the assistance of a lay-sister, who pitied her unfortunate position, she escaped, and found herself in the middle of the street, delighted to have gained her liberty, but not knowing what to do with it, and dying of fear that she should be exposed to insult. Happily, a brilliant thought struck her. She remembered that her father had spoken of a certain friend of his at Lucerne, named M. de Matignon. She made enquiries, succeeded in discovering his dwelling, and told him everything. M. de Matignon was an excellent man, with a loyal mind and pitiful heart. For a long while he turned over in his mind the means for removing his old friend's daughter from the perils which surrounded her. He saw that she was alone, abandoned by all, surrounded by implacable enemies who were interested in her ruin; he was horrified to think that M. de Rocheplate, semi-madman that he was, was no longer capable of asserting his paternal authority. M. de Matignon perceived all these things, and he feared for Valérie's future.

"There is, perhaps, one way of arranging it all," he said to her; "only say the word, and you may become my wife. I possess a large fortune; this marriage will at the same time save your property

and place you beyond the cruel pursuit of your relations. Let me have your decision."

Valérie stopped at this point in her tale; then she recommenced in a sorrowful voice:

"What would you have done in my place? My situation was a terrible one. It seemed to me, as I listened to this kind man's proposal, that I was as one who was drowning, and that someone threw me a rope to rescue me. On the other hand, many months had elapsed since you and I were separated. I feared the vengeance of my aunt, I dreaded a scandal, I knew not how to find you; in one word, I was at the end of my resources, I had lost my head—I accepted the offer."

"You are married?" cried I, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes, duke, to M. de Matignon."

"Well—what sort of a man is he?"

"Oh! the best man in the world—but not the handsomest."

"How old is he?"

"He is fifty-five years of age."

I gave a sigh of relief. Valérie's hand still remained in mine.

"But," I asked, "where is he, how is it I do not see him here?"

"M. de Matignon, a Frenchman by birth, has been for many years a naturalised Swiss; he holds an important post in the Government of this country. Just

now, he is gone to Geneva to fill a mission of importance. He will not return for a week."

After this narration, which was scattered over with avowals which must have been very difficult for Valérie to make, the little clouds which had risen between us were dissipated, and perfect cordiality was soon re-established. We thought no more of M. de Matignon, but of each other, and I perceived with secret plesaure that Valérie was not more annoyed than I was at the change that my arrival brought to her tranquil life.

We had a week to ourselves, a week during which we could talk and enjoy communion of ideas, in which we could think of the past, delight in the present, and even look forward to the future. Our first idea was to visit together the environs of Lucerne. I was curious to see them, and Valérie good-naturedly offered to be my guide. I was overjoyed at the vision of happiness in store for me.

Our departure was fixed for the next day.

During her stay at Lucerne, Valérie had become a valiant and intrepid mountaineer, she knew the district as thoroughly as if she had been born there; the most perilous navigation of the lake was familiar to her, and her foot had more than once climbed the high mountains which surrounded every portion of the horizon. I will not speak of our excursions on the lake, though they have left delicious memories; I shall glide rapidly over our trip to Grütli, where William

Tell's chapel is situated, that I may arrive the more quickly at our ascent of the Righi, the memory of which will be evermore engraven on my heart.

The evening was already a little advanced, when, after a long climb on the backs of mules, we reached the Staffel, where we were to pass the night. Valérie was in a severely-cut costume, which suited her to perfection. I devoured her with my eyes, and alternately admired the power of the Creator and the two wonders I had before me—a woman's beauty and Nature's magnificence. She ordered a separate room for herself, without seeming to comprehend a sly look which I gave her, whose eloquence ought to have been clear enough. I was forced, to my great regret, to separate myself from her, after bidding her a respectful good-night.

It had been arranged that they should call us at three o'clock in the morning. An old guide, one Thomaso Pilati, a native of Piedmont, was to conduct us to one of the peaks of the mountain, whither people came, as he said, from every quarter of the globe, to see the sunrise.

We went to bed. Did Valérie sleep? I cannot say. But one thing I can affirm, and that is that I never closed my eyes.

At the hour arranged we were afoot. The atmosphere was most favourable, the summits of the neighbouring peaks appearing through the bluish vapours which floated over the mountains continu-

ally, even in the clearest weather. We were going to enjoy in all its fulness one of the most admirable delights which can be furnished by the sight of a magical and divine picture. Valérie seemed to feel a childlike joy in guiding me upon a path which was altogether new to me, and in pointing out what best deserved my attention.

Pilati, our guide, made us ascend by means of a sweet and green slope, which exhaled such delicious odours as to intoxicate me. Just at this time, Valérie began to be a little weary, and her figure rested against my arm with adorable abandonment. I asked her if she would like to sit down.

"No," she said, "not yet awhile. Thomaso, let us cross this rock, and help us to get as soon as possible to that tiny cave where we reposed so deliciously on that last excursion which I made with you in this direction with Madame des Valettes."

The guide obeyed, and in less than a quarter of an hour we found the grotto. It was that sort of fabulous cavern which the old authors delight in describing. Broken stones covered with grass seemed to defend the entrance. The opening was arched above, so that it resembled the door of a church.

"Let us penetrate this granite temple," said Valérie, placing her hand in mine; "I wish to show you the most beautiful sight you have ever admired in your life."

I let her lead me. Our guide, at a sign from

Valérie, descended towards a little cottage where it was usual to refresh oneself and rest the mules. The good man doubtless needed a draught of wine, for he was sixty, and notwithstanding his great experience in these climbs, he had not strength enough to struggle with limbs younger and more muscular than his own.

When we were alone, a sense of well-being, whose nature I cannot precisely define, filled our bodies and rapidly communicated itself to our souls. Our entire lives were passing before our eyes. The sky by degrees grew white, the stars became dimmed, and the pale glories of the night disappeared, minute by minute, as the light of day grew brighter. As the dawn spread its rays over nature, the light mists and diaphanous clouds of the mountain vanished as though a mysterious breath had dispersed them.

At this spectacle, both Valérie and I remained stupefied and immovable. Our thoughts grew troubled, our hands were tightly clasped; all our remembrances of past happiness awoke once more; and, yielding to a transport, which the wonders we were witnessing increased, we fell into each other's arms, and forgot the entire world.

That day I realised one of the most ardently desired dreams of my life. . . .

A week later, I left Lucerne with much heartfelt regret.

I learnt later on that Valérie quitted Lucerne, having been obliged to follow her husband into Germany, whither his official functions called him.

I have never seen her since.

The war of the Fronde placed a climax on the favours which had been showered upon me. I was present at the siege of Bordeaux under circumstances remarkable enough to justify a full and particular narration.

The whole of the town, excited by the incendiary proclamations of the Prince of Condé, was a prey to the most abominable disorder. At Bordeaux, neither laws, nor rulers, nor magistrates were recognised. That giddy spirit which it had originally borrowed from the capital had rapidly filled the whole of the south of France; and the culpable complicity of the princes in this seditious movement could at any instant become the cause of the most irreparable and odious misfortunes.

Royalty, menaced on every side, had need of brave defenders. I can boast of having never recoiled a single step in the most difficult moments which my fidelity and devotion had to pass through.

The siege of Bordeaux offered to my mind the opportunity of fulfilling a great duty and to reap some laurels. That was enough to inflame my courage, and I prayed Providence to make me worthy of the height of the mission I had to carry out.

The campaign was not very long. After many days' preparation the attack was ordered. I was in the very front of the battle, the best proof of

my zeal being an arquebuse ball which I received through my body. I was placed upon the sick list. But I had already done enough to be satisfied with myself, and I had the happiness to learn on my bed of pain that the definite advantage had remained with the royal troops, and that the insurrection had been completely quelled.

During the time of my convalescence, great events followed in rapid succession, and all turned out most favourably.

The Revolution made its last struggles. Beaufort and Nemours marched upon Orleans, and Paris attempted to renew those disorders which had previously deluged its streets with blood. Men even saw the truly original spectacle of a woman, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the daughter of Gaston of Orleans, who set forth, wearing a riding-habit, followed by Mesdames de Fiesque and de Frontenac, whom she called the marshals of her camp, to join the army of the rebels.

But all these efforts were destined to be without results. Condé, conquered in the south, was obliged to cross France in disguise, and Turenne gave him a terrible lesson at Bléneau. This victory of the king's troops was a glorious one, and the cannon, which Mademoiselle caused to be fired from the ramparts of the Bastille, was but the powerless echo of the cries of distress of the flying Frondeurs.

Now that we have at length finished with the

sad episode of the wars of France, let us hasten to arrive at the most glorious epoch of the time, that is to say, the moment when Louis XIV., taking the sceptre with a firm hand, ceased to be the plaything of the passions of a frivolous and ambitious court, and showed himself indeed a king.

When I came back from Bordeaux, perfectly cured and ready for new amorous or warlike expeditions, my first care was to go to court and to thank those of my friends and protectors who had interested themselves in my advancement. I had the happiness of being received with the kindest distinction by his majesty, who even deigned to say a word or two in the ear of Monseigneur the Cardinal Mazarin. I should have been considerably embarrassed at the time to guess the reason of this strange aside; but that very evening the explanation was given me in the most natural and agreeable manner in the world.

I received at my residence the title and patent of duke and peer.

This favour gave universal satisfaction at court, and everyone heartily congratulated me, with the sole exception of M. de Saint-Simon, who hated me, I know not why, and who had the bad taste to exhibit his annoyance, at which certain persons were considerably amused. Saint-Simon perceived, unfortunately a little too late, the deplorable effect produced by his bitterness against me. He suc-

ceeded, nevertheless, by his intrigues in doing me an injury, which I found out to be due to his ill-will. The journey to Reims, for the coronation ceremony, was about to be made, and I knew that there was a question as to my forming a portion of the official group. Thanks to the underhand manœuvres of M. de Saint-Simon, this mark of distinction was not accorded me.

I consoled myself by undertaking the voyage to Reims on my own account.

If the reader will permit it, I will present him with a picture in miniature of the imposing ceremony, with which the whole of Europe was pre-occupied for several months.

It was the 3rd of June, 1654.

The king and queen arrived at about a league from Reims, where they were received by the magistrates, who were accompanied by two thousand well-mounted townsmen and followed by five thousand armed men on foot, who lined the road, and who made the air resound with so many acclamations of joy, which expressed their affection far better than the triumphal arches and other sumptuous decorations which they would have erected if an order to the contrary had not placed bounds to their zeal.

The lieutenant of the townsmen attended the king to the gate of the city itself. Here he presented the silver keys to him. Then his majesty, being seated in the queen's coach, alighted before the great portal of

the church, where there is that masterpiece of stone which has represented there for centuries the coronation of King Clovis.

The canons, in scarves of cloth of gold, received the king on getting out of the coach, and offered him a hassock, upon which his majesty knelt; while Monseigneur the Bishop of Soissons, clad in his pontifical habit and preceded by his crozier, respectfully offered holy water to him.

When once the royal procession had entered the church, a general hush came over the multitude, and I shall remember until my dying day the *Te Deum* which was then sung, with a complete accompaniment of the organ and every description of musical instruments.

But let us pass rapidly over the details of the first arrival of Louis XIV. at Reims, to arrive at the great day itself—that is to say, the coronation day.

On Sunday, the 7th of June, I was introduced at three o'clock in the morning, by special favour, and in the company of the Dukes of Vendôme and Candale, into the lofty gallery of the church, whence I could admire the marvellous spectacle of which I shall now attempt to give the reader an idea.

The church, from roof to floor, in the choir, in the nave, and in both aisles, was adorned with the richest and most beautiful of the royal tapestries. The steps of the altar and the pavement of the choir were covered with immense Turkey carpets, and the great

altar, besides its marble inlaid with gold and antique statues of the greatest value, was surmounted by a coronal of the crown diamonds, and its importance was increased by two reliquaries, one containing the head of Saint-Louis, given by Louis XIII. at his coronation, and the other the head of Saint-Remy; this was borne on a massive pedestal of gold.

At the foot of the steps of the high altar was the throne from which the Bishop of Soissons would officiate, and which was rendered specially remarkable by being decorated in violet velvet embroidered with golden fleurs-de-lis. On the other side, directly opposite, was the daïs prepared for the king, the ornaments of which transcended human description.

At four o'clock (for it was now already daylight) the canons and church officials took their places in their stalls. And now we soon saw the Bishop of Soissons enter in his rochet and stole, wearing the hood and the cope and his mitre, and carrying a crozier. Behind him came the choir, with the Bishops of Rennes, St. Paul, and of Coutances and Agde; they had been summoned to sing the litanies. I recognised successively the Archbishops of Bourges and Rouen, and the Bishops of Amiens and Senlis, who had been chosen to chant the epistle and gospel.

About half-past five, four noblemen were despatched from the archbishop's palace, whose mission was to seek the Holy Ampulla at the Abbey of Saint-Remy. During this time the six lay peers arrived from the

palace, and took their places before the high altar. They were the Dukes of Vendôme, Elbœuf, Candale, Rouanais, Bournonville; they were clad in tunics of cloth of silver on rainbow-silk, and in scarlet ducal mantles with a violet tinge.

They took their seats according to the directions of the master of the ceremonies: then everyone turned towards the door, where we saw appear the Queen of France, the Queen of England, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, her sons, the Princess of England, her daughter, the Princess of Conti, the Princess Palatine, and the Duchess of Vendôme.

Then my eyes lost themselves in the midst of an inexpressible confusion of rochets, hoods, mantles trimmed with ermine, high satin collars, robes embroidered with pearls, diamond necklaces, glittering crosses, holy relics, magnificently chiselled golden candlesticks, and great wax candles, whose flaming wicks resembled thousands of stars.

Some one then informed me that the great deputation, charged to seek the king, was about to set forth. I joined it with pride, and this is what took place before my eyes.

The Bishops of Beauvais and of Chalons, preceded by the precentor and the sub-precentor, having arrived at the royal antechamber, halted at the door for a moment.

After a pause which lasted for three or four seconds, the precentor struck two blows with his silver baton.

"What do you want?"

The Bishop of Beauvais answered:

"The king."

"The king sleeps," answered the Grand Chamberlain.

A second time the same question and answer were exchanged.

At last, for the third time, the bishop said, in a solemn tone:

"We demand Louis XIV., son of that great king, Louis XIII., whom God has given us as king."

Then the door opened and the two bishops entered.

The king awaited them upon a bed of ceremony, lying on the right side, clad in a shirt of lawn, and a bed-gown of red satin shaped like a tunic; over these he wore a long robe of silver tissue. His head was covered by a bonnet of black velvet, garnished with a cordon of diamonds of great value, and a white feather and a double aigrette. Thereupon, they sprinkled him with holy water, and Monseigneur de Beauvais addressed to him a Latin oration.

I was obliged to retire then, and I occupied my time in hastening back to the church, so as to witness the triumphal entry of my glorious and beloved sovereign.

About an hour passed away.

The crowd waited in respectful silence.

At length, I heard a great roaring sound rise round the walls of the holy building, which commenced as

the whisperings of a distant whirlwind in northern seas, increased by degrees and finished by a formidable explosion, somewhat similar to that which Vesuvius or Etna might give forth at the commencement of an eruption. I soon learnt the meaning of this immense reverberation.

The head of the procession was composed of a vanguard of a hundred Swiss, led by their captain, Monsieur de Monmège; they marched to the music of a band, composed of twelve drums and an infinite number of trumpets, fifes, oboes, flutes, bagpipes, and sackbuts. It executed concerted pieces with marvellous accuracy.

After the Swiss guard came the heralds, clothed in white velvet with their trunk-hose, coat-of-arms, and heraldic wand in hand; then came a hundred gentlemen of the king's household carrying their halberds; Monsieur de Rhodes, Grand Master of the Ceremonies of France; then came the Maréchal d'Estrées bearing a drawn sword; the lay peers, each having two ushers with maces as an escort.

Last came the king.

At that august entrance, I was as though dazzled, and it seemed to me that a ray of fierce sunshine blinded my eyes.

Prince Eugène of Savoy carried his majesty's train. Immediately afterwards appeared the Chancellor, who had an air which was something grander than that of simple mortals, and who wore his crimson

satin cassock in a most imposing manner. His mantle and judicial hood were scarlet, and on his head he bore a legal bonnet of cloth of gold, trimmed with ermine.

I will not trouble you with the other members of the procession. Among the principal personages who attracted my attention were the Duc de Choiseul, the Comte de Vivonne, Charost, and the Marquis d'Humières.

When the *Veni Creator* had been sung, the Holy Ampulla was brought in front of the door of the church. He who carried it was the Grand Prior of the abbey of Saint-Remy. He was mounted upon a white horse, which was led by two head-grooms of the royal stable; above his head was borne a canopy of cloth of silver.

Immediately M. de Soissons perceived the arrival of the Holy Ampulla, accompanied by the Bishops of Amiens, Senlis, and Cæsarea, he advanced to the end of the nave, close to the great doorway.

The Prior then offered him the Holy Ampulla.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I place in your hands this precious treasure, which was sent down from heaven to the great saint Remy, for the consecration of Clovis and those kings who might succeed him. But, beforehand, I beg you, according to ancient custom, to bind yourself to return it to my hands as soon as the coronation of our great king Louis XIV. has been accomplished."

The prelate, having promised to fulfil the conditions, the Holy Ampulla was immediately surrendered to him.

After numerous ceremonies of minor importance, the Holy Ampulla was deposited upon the altar, and the king, whose example was followed by everyone present, bowed to it ceremoniously.

Some minutes afterwards the form of oath was read to Louis XIV.; he repeated it in a loud voice, with his head covered and his hands upon the gospel.

I pass lightly over certain details, such as the formality of demanding of the peers and people if they accepted Louis as their sovereign, also the numerous changes of dress which the king had to go through, and of the benediction of the sword of Charlemagne.

And now I come to the preparation of the Holy Chrysm. After an indefinite number of orisons had been recited and anthems had been sung, of questions and responses made in the monotonous accent peculiar to the church, of comings and goings, which seemed never ending, they proceeded with the curious ceremony to which I alluded above.

The Bishop of Soissons returned to the altar in order to prepare the Holy Unction.

Firstly, he placed the golden paten of Saint-Remy upon the middle of the tabernacle, and the Grand Prior having received from the Treasurer the silver key of the little casket which contained the Holy

Ampulla, he opened it, and drawing forth the heavenly gift, placed it in the hands of the Bishop of Amiens, the officiating deacon, and took from it a portion about the size of a grain of wheat. This he placed upon the paten, while the nave resounded with the religious songs of the choirs, and they did not fail in causing profound emotion in the hearts of everyone present.

Then the *Kyrie Elison* and litanies were chanted.

Then the anointments commenced.

The king was on his knees. The Bishop of Soissons, seated and wearing his mitre, took with his thumb the Holy Chrysm prepared from the golden cup of Saint-Remy.

Firstly, he made the sign of the cross on the summit of his majesty's head, saying:

"*Ungo te in regem de oleo sanctificato. In nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*"

He repeated this formula at each of the six following anointings, which were made upon the stomach, between the two shoulders, on the right shoulder, on the left shoulder, and on the joints of the arms. There remained yet two unctions to be made. But to proceed to this last ceremony, which would complete the holy consecration of royalty, the king's costume was changed. The Bishop of Soissons, aided by his brethren of Senlis and Amiens, clothed with little golden cords the openings in the shirt and bed-gown of the king, and the Great Chamberlain

presented him with the three following garments: the tunic, the dalmatic, and the royal mantle. The last two anointings were at length made upon the palms of each of the hands of Louis XIV. The benediction of the ring and the summoning of the peers preceded the actual coronation, which was done with the great crown of Charlemagne, which had been especially brought from Saint-Denis for this august solemnity.

It is impossible to form an idea of the delight and pride felt by all the spectators at the sight of the king wearing his crown.

It seemed that France, there represented by her noblest and most famous men, was seized with a movement of pride in beholding herself honoured and renowned in the person of her worthiest representative.

Louis XIV. was then conducted to the throne which had been prepared beneath the rude loft, and the Bishop of Soissons, having kissed him, declaimed in a loud voice, which was heard throughout the assembly: "*Vivat Rex in æternum!*" Then burst forth an uproar from every side which was indescribable. The fifes, the trumpets, the oboes, blended with the thunderous acclamations of the people, filled the whole city with the cry of *Vive le roi!* Pieces of money, struck for the occasion of the ceremony of the coronation, were distributed with a truly royal profusion; and the king's fowlers set free from the

rude loft in the church an innumerable quantity of little birds, who rose in a great cloud towards the dome, warbling and fluttering their wings.

At length the successive celebration of mass, of ceremony of offering and of the communion took place.

Afterwards the king returned to the palace.

That evening there was the grand entertainment given by the gentlemen of the town of Reims. As I was not a member of his majesty's official court, I was not invited, but the intrigues of M. de Saint-Simon could not prevent my being admitted to the reception and kissing of hands which followed the dinner itself.

On the following day the town of Reims enjoyed one of the rarest spectacles that could please mortal eye. The weather was lovely, and the opportunity was seized for organising in a magnificent manner what is termed the *cavalcade* to Saint-Remy. This is ordinarily a grand ceremonial visit which takes place after a coronation, in which the new king beseeches of the great saint, the protector of France, the continuation of his goodwill and of his benedictions. Never have I seen so rich and brilliant a sight as that cavalcade.

One noticed at the head of the procession a company of light horse. The Grand Provost followed with his lieutenant and sixty archers of the Provost's guard. An infinite number of noblemen increased the

procession and made it the most gorgeous and distinguished in the world. But not one amongst all these seigneurs of the best and purest nobility of France could be possibly compared with the king, who wore a dress of cloth of silver, cut in the antique fashion, a hood embroidered with silver, a bonnet of black velvet decorated with an aigrette; he rode, as though he had been the finest horseman upon earth, a white hackney, which carried its head in a warlike but gentle manner. This procession of Louis XIV. through the town was the cause of great joy among the populace, and his majesty had the satisfaction, during the whole of his progress, of being accompanied by the perfervid and endless acclamations of a people who saw in him their consolation, their hope and their idol.

CHAPTER XXXVI

I remain several days at Reims after the king's departure—An unexpected meeting—A reminiscence of twenty years back—The recognition — Inopportune reflections and blamable regrets with which the sight of two pretty children inspire me—A simple transition.

The reader will perhaps remember a certain meeting that took place near the village of Donchery, a short time after I had been wounded at the fight of La Marfée. A coach rushing at full speed on the road from Mézières to Sedan had attracted my attention; the attitude of the postillion, the headlong speed, all these circumstances had seemed to me suspicious enough to inspire me with the desire to know what it was all about. I planted myself firmly in the middle of the road, at the risk of being knocked down by the brutal Automedon, and my air of authority had been enough to make him stop, and caused him to give me, after a trifling gratuity, certain explanations. . . .

The carriage was carrying off a young and very pretty girl, very fresh, and, above all, very innocent. She had been delighted to find a protector in me, and I truly had had the luck to rescue her from a real

danger. After having taken her to an inn to obtain from her the real truth of the matter, I found that she had been treacherously put to sleep by means of a powerful narcotic. The reader will without doubt remember that I asked the innkeeper to go in search of a physician who should treat my charming invalid, and that I received a visit from a sort of jackass, who disguised himself under the name of Mathielmus, and who pretended only to care to undertake the treatment of persons of quality, a passably ridiculous pretension, to which I unceremoniously replied by a kick to the illustrious *savant's* seat of honour.

During this discussion, my unknown told me her name was Fanfette, and begged me to conduct her to Reims, where she had an aunt who loved her tenderly.

I obeyed, and after a short journey, on which I showed her, very nearly, all the respect due from a brother to his sister, I left her at Reims, taking away with me the satisfaction of having done a good action, as well as the hope of *soon* being recompensed.

Alas! I had written this word under the influence of the delightful thoughts which filled my soul. At that moment, while my hand was still warm with the pressure of Fanfette's, and my soul was full of her image, it seemed to me as if we must soon meet again. Soon means a long time, sometimes, for twenty years had passed since I escorted Fanfette

to Reims, where the king's coronation had brought me once more. The coronation ceremony was at last over, and his majesty had already left the place, when one morning, as I was walking in the environs of the town, I was struck with the appearance of a lady about five or six and thirty, who was leading two children who were as beautiful as the day. I was excited by her distracting waist, her fresh little figure, above all by a pair of eyes which blazed with all the fire of youth. I looked at the lady several several times.

I was to a certain extent astonished, when I noticed that my ogles were returned, and that she blushed.

I approached. . . .

She stopped.

"Fanfette!" I cried, as though the name had been forced from my breast by a supreme effort of will.

"M. de Roquelaure!" she replied, fired without doubt by her remembrance of me.

"We must agree," said I, as I approached her, "that this is either sorcery or the intervention of Heaven. We meet, after twenty years of separation, as if we had parted but yesterday. 'Tis indeed a prodigy."

"No," replied she, "the thing is simple enough; you were good to me, and it is not my memory, but my heart, M. de Roquelaure, which has retained the remembrance of you."

"You are adorable," cried I, passionately seizing and kissing the hand which she offered me. "But shall I be as unhappy to-day as on the evening of our short interview? Have you nothing to tell me about yourself? For, after all, I know nothing about you, your feelings, or even your mode of life. . . . That is to say," I added, looking at the two children with admiration mixed with sadness, "I can see you are a mother, and that consequently you have rendered one man happy."

"I did but pay a debt," replied Fanfette, whose brow was now shaded with a trace of melancholy, "and if you will consent to accompany me to that garden, whose walls and trees we can see from here, I will tell you in a few words my whole life's history."

"In a few words," replied I with a smile, "I can well believe you. The life of an accomplished woman like you can be summed up in two syllables, 'loving.'"

"You deceive yourself, M. de Roquelaure, and you had better say, 'sacrifice.'"

Tears fell from Fanfette's eyes. I followed her. We arrived at the garden; she opened the little wicket and we penetrated into a sort of fragrant Eden, where one breathed delicious odours.

"Where are we?" I asked her as we entered.

"At the Countess Amélie-Laure de Flégères'."

"Is she one of your friends?"

"You shall know shortly."

She conducted me under an alley of lime-trees to

a shady thicket, where there was a seat of turf; by a sign she ordered me to sit beside her. I obeyed. The two children, who were as beautiful as cherubs, raced away towards the tiny lawn a hundred paces off, covered with buttercups and daisies.

Profiting by the presence of a stranger, who was sure to distract for a while their mother's watchfulness, the two charming children hastened to enjoy the liberty which we permitted. Soon we saw them in the distance, rolling on the grass or gambolling among the flowers.

Perhaps you can understand that the sight of these two children annoyed and tormented me, and caused my blood to boil. I looked from the two beautiful little angels to Fanfette, and then, I could not help it, I thought of those white shoulders which I had so much admired, of that supple body which I had held in my arms, of that brow of snow which I had warmed with my breath, of those coral lips which I had kissed with mine, and I thought with bitterness that, notwithstanding all my art, all my cleverness, I had but secured problematic delights similar to those permitted to the unhappy Tantalus. Thus, then, I had allowed this treasure to escape me but to abandon her to someone else! Thus I had but smelt the flower which another, coming after me, had gathered and worn!

But all these regrets, all these suspicions, would have been an insult to Fanfette.

I was careful not to breathe a word of them.

I contented myself with admiring, sighing, and regretting in silence. Her sweet confidence recompensed me a little. With a gesture I signified my impatience.

Then Fanfette, looking round her to be sure that no indiscreet ear could catch her words, commenced as follows.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Fanfette's history—Her stay with Madame du Hainault—A silent love—The Count de Flégères' window—A portrait of that gentleman—A strange declaration—Retirement into an Ursuline convent at Mézières—The postchaise—The box of lozenges—The abduction—A remembrance of how I met Fanfette on the road from Mézières to Sedan—Thierret, the Count de Flégères' *valet-de-chambre*—Fanfette's return to Reims—She believes herself delivered from her persecutor—Her love for the Baron de Lutz—Her marriage is decided on—Preparations—The Count de Flégères appears once more—The love-letter—Strange language for a lover—A five weeks' truce—The wedding presents—The marvellous bouquet—The day before the wedding—Fanfette retires for the night.

"About a year before we met on the Sedan road, M. de Roquelaure, I dwelt in the house of an aunt, who was as a mother to me, in one of the most retired quarters in the town of Reims. I was fifteen years of age, people said I was pretty, and my aunt, Madame du Hainault, a venerable woman, sixty years of age, watched over me with a tender vigilance, such as only maternal affection can inspire.

"In the same street, and nearly opposite our house, lived a man of about six-and-thirty years

of age, but he had no longer that air of youth and vigour by which that period of life is ordinarily distinguished; as he sat alone at his window his eyes were continually fixed on mine. He would pass the entire day in watching for the moment when I should leave the house, and then he used to come forth and follow me at the distance of a few paces. On the first few occasions I paid very little attention to him. But soon his persistence wearied me, and I grew to dislike him so, that I dared not come to my window, and I kept my casement almost always closed.

"At the end of a six months' continual struggle between this man and me, who did not wish to be seen, he took a more sensible mode of making our acquaintance; he caused himself to be presented to my aunt by a neighbour, and, without beating about the bush, asked for my hand in marriage.

"Madame du Hainault knew how I had been annoyed by the mute assiduities of the Count de Flégères (for such was his name); therefore she did not receive his proposal without a certain amount of dislike. She raised a thousand objections, each more plausible than before, but the strongest one she did not dare to allege, was that I thoroughly disliked him and that I had resolved, being independent in fortune and position, never to give my heart but to a man whose tastes sympathised entirely with mine.

"The Count de Flégères was born of a German mother, his father being a nobleman of Champagne, had neither a German appearance nor a French character. He was a very Englishman for phlegm, which showed itself on his person and his peculiar disposition for sombre and melancholy ideas. He heard, with the greatest tranquillity, all my aunt's objections; he did not dispute them, but appeared to accept the greater part of her theories and to be ready to take his dismissal. But no sooner had she finished speaking than he answered with a calm firmness, that made my aunt tremble:

"'Madame, you have a perfect right to refuse me your niece's hand. Your niece is, of course, at perfect liberty to marry another man. But, should she do so, I consider it my duty, as an honest man, that I shall kill myself . . . unless I should manage to think of some good way of curing myself of the passion which I feel for your niece, a passion which will assuredly cause me to commit an imprudence, a folly, or a crime.'

"My aunt, as you can well fancy, listened to the count with profound stupefaction. After which she perceived that his eye began to wander and that he never even dreamed of taking his leave, two peculiarities which caused her to make up her mind to dismiss him, and to forbid him the house, in case he should make his appearance a second time. The count took his leave, without seeming to be aware of

the nature of his reception, and as little upset as if he were still in a position to hope for success.

"He called again indeed on the next and following days. The object of his visit remained the same. My aunt's answer never varied. Only towards the fifteenth or sixteenth visit she began to see that M. de Flégères, though outwardly calm, was really considerably excited.

"Madame du Hainault warned me. I was sorry for the count, but had no other feeling for him than one of pity. A week passed without our seeing anything of him. We thought that he had given up his useless pursuit of me.

"But one day, when I was walking alone in a little courtyard attached to my aunt's house, I saw M. de Flégères coming towards me; he was pale and his eyes sparkled, his appearance frightened me, I tried to fly, I called for help, but he held me by the arm, telling me that Madame du Hainault was gone out, and that my cries could not be heard. I was frozen with terror, I could hardly speak. All that I could do was to ask him what he expected from me. Then, he made me the maddest declaration that any woman ever listened to in her life. His voice trembled so, that you could have sworn that he was suffering from ague, and I can remember that his hands, which never ceased pressing mine, for I was unable to prevent it, passed from the most burning heat to an icy coldness. He did not in

this interview exceed the strict bounds imposed by respect. But his love expressed itself in such savage terms, his tenderness made itself perceptible by such violent protestations, that I very nearly fainted away with fear, and my dread prevented my repulsing him as I had fully intended.

"Happily, Madame du Hainault arrived. Her appearance put an end to a scene which I had begun to find much too long, and M. de Flégères left us both a prey to an agitation from which we had some difficulty in recovering."

"The torture to which I was subjected for an entire hour had left such an unpleasant recollection, that I feared the renewal of a similar scene. My aunt herself dreaded the persecutions of this man, who was like a lunatic, and whose love showed itself in such strange and abrupt fashions. I was easily frightened. Each time that I thought that I heard the sound of a voice or footsteps of the count, I was seized with a trembling which caused my blood to run cold and well-nigh stopped my respiration. It was this perpetual danger that it now became urgent to fight against or get rid of by hook or by crook. Madame du Hainault had an excellent friend at Mézières, who was the superior of an Ursuline convent. We decided that I should pass some time there, and that I should leave at night in order that no one should know whither I was being taken.

"I remained in peace for about three months. I

regularly received news of my aunt and corresponded with her continually. One of her last letters had considerably reassured me as to the Count de Flégères. He had started, she said, on a long journey, and she expressed the intention to soon come herself to conduct me back to Reims, where her loneliness had rendered life almost insupportable. I was expecting her arrival, when one evening a man, whom they assured me came from Madame du Hainault, asked for me in the parlour of the convent. I went down to him. He was a sort of coachman, wearing a great coat of rough grey cloth; his honest air predisposed me at once in his favour. He told me that he was a man from Reims, and that my aunt had been taken so seriously ill, that she desired to have me with her immediately, that he had an excellent carriage, and that he had ascertained that there was no lack of post-horses at the various stages. The man talked with such simplicity, that it was impossible to feel any suspicion of him. The fact of my aunt's indisposition was more than likely, and I knew enough of her to be sure that in case of illness she would send for me at once. I consulted the lady superior. She thought as I did, and I hastened to set out. At the moment I got into the carriage a last incident thoroughly reassured me. My postillion handed me a little box, which contained a peculiar kind of lozenge much affected by my aunt, which she was in the habit of eating at all hours of the day

and of offering to all her acquaintances. My aunt alone could have paid me this little attention.

"The carriage set off at a slow pace. Night had fallen, so that I could hardly distinguish objects at the roadside. Still, it seemed to me that I did not altogether recognise the road by which I had come from Reims, particularly at a certain distance from the town, where I had noticed a magnificent mansion on my right; and now, seeing nothing whatever on my left, I yielded to a sudden fear, and cried aloud to my postillion. Then, without stopping, but merely turning the apron of the chaise, he begged me to pardon him, protesting that he wished me no harm, and that a certain Baron de Hohenstauff, a most venerable personage, expected me at Sedan, that he had white hair and wore a superb diamond cross upon his breast and a great scar upon his forehead, that it was impossible not to recognise in him at once a retired general of the Emperor of Germany. At this portrait I trembled, for I knew that the Count de Flégères had in his service an old servitor who answered this description accurately, and certainly had an enormous scar on the face, the history of which was unknown. I suspected that there was a snare, a deception or a trick, and I began to scream with all my might."

At this part of Fanfette's story I could not restrain a slight movement.

"I see that my remembrances affect you," she

said, squeezing my hand, "for it was just at this moment that I had the happiness to find you upon the road. There is no need to recall to your mind what passed. To you I owe my rescue from the attempts of my ravisher and my escape from one of the greatest perils which could menace a young girl. Having thus returned, I rejoined my aunt, who was in robust health and surprised at my return. I told her what had happened in minute detail, and she shuddered at the very thought of the abyss into which I had almost fallen.

"In looking back on it, it is easy to see the mysterious hand of the Count de Flégères in the comedy which was enacted for my destruction. As for the pretended Baron de Hohenstauff, it was plain enough that Thierret, the old steward of the count, who had a detestable reputation, and who became a valet after being originally a druggist, had been frequently under suspicion of having secretly sold certain chemical compositions the use of which is illegal; this is the man who played the part of the baron. He was, without doubt, dressed for the part in order to inspire confidence in the officious intermediary who was the principal actor in my abduction.

"You can well conceive, M. de Roquelaure, that there was no longer any question of sending me back to Mézières. The experiment at the Ursuline convent had not been a success. My aunt resolved for the

second time to keep me with her at Reims. At this time our house seemed to have regained its tranquillity, for there was no further sign of M. de Flégères. We neither saw any more of him nor of the old man Thierret, the confidant, or rather the accomplice, in all his wicked deeds. Soon the emotions which I attempted to depict for you were well-nigh forgotten.

"And it was then," continued Fanfette, with a gentle sigh, raising her expressive eyes towards heaven, "it was then that divine goodness permitted me to enjoy, if not happiness itself, at least its shadow. I gave my heart and my entire affection to the young Baron de Lutz, whom I frequently met at various festivities in the town of Reims. During the winter which followed my return from the convent, he loved me ardently, and I can confess to you, you who are my friend, for it is so, is it not? that my tenderness equalled his. My aunt, after consulting me, accepted the offer he made for my hand, and the date of our marriage was fixed for the early part of August, 1644. We were at the end of June, but only six weeks separated us from the moment of our happiness, when an event which came upon me like a thunderbolt, suddenly sowed in my heart the seed of the most lively and cruel inquietudes.

"While walking in the Place with my aunt, I suddenly found myself face to face with the Count de Flégères.

"I trembled from head to foot, I was ready to sink into the ground.

"'You do hate me very much, eh?' he whispered in my ear.

"'No, Count,' I replied, 'I do not hate you, because I know not what it is to hate.'

"'Then why not love me?' . . .

"'Because I love another, Count.'

"I appeared so upset, that he immediately offered me his arm, and my aunt had not the courage to make any opposition. He reconducted us thus to our own door, and having vainly waited for us to invite him to enter, bade us adieu with cold politeness. Once back in my own little room, I thought of M. de Lutz in order to dispel the sombre preoccupations which had filled my mind as soon as I found myself in the arms of the Count de Flégères. Mechanically I opened my window; there he was at *his* window exactly opposite me. I lowered my curtain and retired into a corner. It seemed that some evil was menacing me. Happily, the Baron de Lutz arrived that evening as usual. We enjoyed ourselves, and I retired to bed at midnight, feeling happier than I had felt all day.

"The first thing that struck me on entering my room was a little piece of paper attached to a stone. I picked it up, less with the idea of reading it than in order to prevent it falling into doubtful hands. My first idea was to burn it in the flame of my lamp,

but curiosity overcame me. I undid the stone, which I had flung on to the hearth, and read the letter, whose terms, notwithstanding the years that had rolled by, have ever remained in my memory:

"MADEMOISELLE,—There are certain things which are written both in heaven and in hell. Had you willed it so, I should have been both kind and happy. You have chosen to treat me cruelly; I shall be bad and cruel, and this does not mean that I shall resign myself to be unhappy. For, do not fail to understand this, in spite of your aunt, who hates me, in spite of you who repulse me, in spite of him whom you love, in spite of heaven, in spite of hell, in spite of everything, you must, you shall be mine!

"I leave you to think how the reading of this letter troubled me. I reflected a long time without coming to any conclusion if I should communicate this new impertinence of M. de Flégères to Madame du Hainault. My first idea was to tell her everything; but soon, thinking already of the mortal inquietudes which she had had to suffer, I changed my mind, and I hastened to reduce the infamous letter to ashes, looking upon it as a mere vain threat, which could only be explained by an excess of wounded vanity or of impotent spite.

"After a truce of five weeks, my aunt and I had reason to think that we were definitely free from the count's importunities, for he had gone so far as to leave his town residence in order to shut himself up in a little country-house which he owned at two leagues from Reims. It seemed without doubt that

he had accepted the failure of his various enterprises, and we were fain to hope that the news of my marriage would cure him finally.

"After all, as the great day approached, the preliminaries of my wedding occupied my mind so exclusively that I had no longer time to look back, and I trusted entirely in Heaven to assure my happiness.

"We were at the eve of my wedding, and we were finishing our last arrangements, when most admirable presents of a most flattering nature were brought me from Baron de Lutz. The *corbeille* was something marvellous; everything which it contained was distinguished by an infinite delicacy and good taste in its selection. But, strange to say, the gift which excited my surprise and delight the most, which had the most charm for me, was an enormous bouquet composed of the most delicious flowers, the rarest and most fragrant that imagination could conceive.

"The dresses, the laces, the veils, and the diamonds were exhibited on the chairs and sofas. It was a fairy-like sight, well suited to arouse a young girl's pride. As for me (and what I am going to say is not a vain boast, I swear it to you), I thought less of my satisfied vanity than of my constancy and my tenderness, now so delightfully rewarded. I saw in this profusion but a new proof of the affection the Baron de Lutz had for me, and my pride was only exceeded by my happiness.

"It was quite a fête-day. Madame du Hainault,

witnessing my joy, remarked to me that this generosity was the best possible omen of to-morrow, and I retired to my room, where I was to pass my last night as a young girl, content with the present, full of faith in the future, and calm, with that unalterable quietude which is caused by the certainty of happiness.

"Madame du Hainault had accompanied me to my door. There she kissed me tenderly, and advised me to go to bed at once.

"I'll just say my prayers," I replied, "and I shall be fast asleep in a moment."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Conclusion and end of Fanfette's history—She contemplates the heavens to find her star—Strange sensations—She gets into bed—Fanfette's precautions—It seems that her confession will be of a delicate nature—I encourage her—She recommences her tale—She found it difficult to go to sleep—Of the admirable things she saw in her dream—An enterprising seraph—The danger of dreams — Day dissipates not the nocturnal phantoms—The late arrival of Madame du Hainault The surprised lover—The leap from the window—Rupture with the Baron de Lutz—Good-bye to happiness for Fanfette —She sacrifices her liberty to her honour—Her resolution —Her marriage—Her martyrdom—Saintly Fanfette.

"Before lying down, I could hardly resist a desire to gaze into the sublimities of the heavens, where among the many stars that sparkled, a young girl always delights in seeking and discovering her own.

"The weather was extraordinarily hot, and the heavens were glorious in spite of the darkness which seemed to overshadow the earth. The more my eyes were directed towards the lofty vault of heaven, the more startlingly clear did it seem. I soon guessed the secret of this phenomenon. The moon was about to rise over the horizon, and the light was the premonitory torch of her soft rays.

"Without thinking of it, I remained some time

absorbed and preoccupied with this beautiful sight. But I could not help remarking that this sentiment of admiration, whose effects I had already felt, was not absolutely similar to that I was accustomed to experience. It seemed to me that I was gradually sinking into a sort of agreeable torpor, under the influence of which everything seemed to be becoming clouded with a vague and indefinable vapour, in which my thoughts began to wander as if in an unfathomable abyss.

"I looked around me for an explanation of this, so to say, novel situation, which my soul and senses experienced, and soon the thing explained itself. I had retained, pinned in my bodice, some of the flowers of the delicious bouquet which had been so graciously sent me by the Baron de Lutz, and without doubt their scent had gone to my head. I removed the flowers with regret, because they came from my well-beloved. I placed them upon the commode. Then, having bolted my window and said my prayers to God, I got into bed.

"Here, M. de Roquelaure," said Fanfette, with a deep sigh, "I need all your indulgence; make allowance for me as you hear my story. That which I am about to tell you I blush to narrate. But you did me a great service long ago, and showed me disinterested kindness; you have, in a word, had such a large share in preserving me from a catastrophe which, unfortunately, was only postponed,

that I should consider myself ungrateful indeed if I did not respond to a devotion the tender remembrance of which has never left me, by a perfectly frank and complete avowal of the truth."

"You cannot think," I replied, "how your story interests me. Continue this confession, I beg, in the same manner you have used up to now, which bears the mark of irreproachable purity. Whatever may be the avowals which you may yet have to make, nothing can stain the innocence of your intentions. Whatever you may have to tell me, your language will purify it."

Fanfette thanked me with a glance and a gentle grasp of her slender white hand. Then she continued:

"My first thoughts, as soon as I had got into the bed, to which I seemed to be addressing a young girl's farewell—my first thoughts, I say, were of the Baron de Lutz. Till now I had never really appreciated the good qualities of his heart and the charms of his mind. I loved him, as a girl of seventeen does love, with a pure and sweet tenderness which arises from a sympathy which it is impossible to analyse, and which is altogether free from any material preoccupation. Shall I confess it? As I was dropping off to sleep, I felt a sort of secret fire run through my veins, a dull heaviness of mysterious and vague prostration, which I could not explain, weighed down my limbs, and every moment became more terribly oppressive. I tried

to struggle against it, but my courage failed me, and my physical strength, which seemed to be decreased little by little, now left me altogether, as did my power of resistance, in a slow and irresistible transformation which took entire possession of my body.

"Then there commenced for me, I will not say a punishment, for that would be a lie, but one of those incomprehensible trials to which nature subjects us girls at some period of our lives. My heart beat with inexpressible violence, my bosom swelled, I began to sigh with incredible rapidity, and my arms, thrust out by an unknown power, sought to clutch their object with mad desire. A blinding light dazzled my astonished eyes, and I felt myself whirling through space and light. Angels bore me on their transparent wings. But they were not the angels of my childhood and youth, the cherubs clothed in white robes, with foreheads bound with golden crowns. No, these were luminous beings, having both the human and the seraphic nature, full of youth and strength, flinging upon me fragrant flowers, and making with their fingers delicious harmony upon the strings of enchanted harps.

"How am I to define this feeling which now possessed me altogether?

"I was afraid of the imposing spectacle, yet I wished to enjoy it for ever.

"I cried out with fear, and flung myself into the middle of the danger.

"I was happy . . . and yet I suffered.

"Up to now, my part had been a passive one, and my soul only appreciated this succession of strange emotions by a sort of magical intuition.

"But, by degrees, everything grew light around me, and objects became clear in my sight. One of these luminous seraphs, whose look seemed to light up everything around him, approached me, and murmured in my ear sounds so melodious, that I remained as though petrified with delight and pleasure. I tried to look in his face, but the bright light which surrounded me made me lower my eyelids.

"Then, I distinctly felt lips brush my forehead, touch my cheeks, and press kisses to my lips; a daring hand undid the neck-fastening of my white nightdress, in such a way that in an instant my shoulders and bosoms were delivered without defence to ardent and convulsive embraces. Everything fell from me, and, obeying, as does a slave, a superhuman will, I returned the caresses given me, and shared a delirious joy produced by I know not what—hallucination, mingled with fear and horror."

Fanfette had become red with blushes as she told her tale; she stopped to take breath and hid her face for a moment between her hands. I, on my side, felt considerable emotion.

Not wishing, without doubt, to give me time to make any remark to which she might have found it difficult to reply, she continued at once:

"I cannot precisely tell you how long this dream, which I shall never forget till my dying day, went on; but it was about seven o'clock in the morning when I shook off the heavy vapours of this strange night, and sat up in the bed. My aunt was standing in the middle of the room, leaning upon the back of a chair, and looking at me with horrified eyes. The poor woman had aged by twenty years; her dishevelled grey hair gave her countenance a sombre and sinister appearance.

"'What is the matter, dear aunt, and why do you look at me so strangely?'

"'Do you ask me why? Unhappy girl!'

"'I do not understand you!'

"'Oh!' cried Madame du Hainault, with a double expression of fear and disgust.

"'My dear, dear aunt, I beg, in the name of heaven, you will explain yourself.'

"'You speak of heaven?' cried Madame du Hainault; 'can you call heaven as a witness to your innocence?' . . .

"'What a question!'

"'But can you? Can you swear to me upon the soul of your dead father that you have not yielded your honour to a wretch?' . . .

"'Oh, aunt, by my father's soul I swear it!'

"'So, then, no one has been here, last night, in bed with you?' . . .

"'No one, aunt . . . only I had a dream . . oh! . . . a very strange dream.'

"Then I told her my dream.

"'My poor child,' said Madame du Hainault to me, after having listened to me attentively, 'your dream was a reality!'

"I gave a piercing scream.

"'Just now,' continued Madame du Hainault, 'I entered your room, as I do every morning, and I found a man there, who looked at you with passion, and who, on seeing me, leapt from the window.' . . .

"'That man, oh! aunt, that man . . .'

"'That man was the Count de Flégères.'

"I fell back unconscious.

"I came to myself; I was again alone with Madame du Hainault, but I heard the voice of Baron de Lutz, who desired to be admitted. Without having exchanged a single word, my aunt and I understood each other.

"'My dear child,' she said to me, 'two lines of conduct may be pursued with M. de Lutz: to deceive him, and so become his wife; or to tell him everything, and so lose his love. Choose!'

"'I shall tell him everything,' I replied firmly.

"You could understand," said Fanfette, with a sob, "what it would cost me to make such a confession. That very evening the Baron de Lutz quitted Reims never to return.

"All this time the moment fixed for my marriage was drawing near. We were to have been married in a private chapel belonging to an old gentleman, a

cousin of Madame du Hainault's, who had desired that the ceremony should take place under his roof, fancying that it might bring good fortune to the end of his life. What was to be done? Madame du Hainault, by announcing the news to our aged relative, feared to cause his death. On the other hand, to avow to the guests invited to the nuptial ceremony the scandalous occurrence of which I had been the victim, would have been to cover me with shame and infamy.

"The hours flew rapidly on. By this time several people had desired the favour of seeing her whom they already called the bride, and my aunt was at the end of her resources for getting rid of these officious visitors, when it was announced that the Count de Flégères desired a moment's conversation.

"At the count's name my aunt and I looked at each other in astonishment; we did not know what to do, nor even what we were doing. But when one has already put one foot in the abyss, one grasps the slenderest branch, one clings to the slightest hope.

"'Bid him enter,' said my aunt.

"The Count de Flégères made his appearance; he was very much agitated, and his eyes appeared even more wild than ordinarily. It is a strange thing to say, but he appeared to me who had been so violently outraged, to my aunt whose affection for me had been so deeply wounded, as the messenger of peace, as the personification of salvation.

"'What do you do here?' said Madame du Hainault.

"He did not appear to hear her words.

"My aunt repeated her question.

"'How do I know,' he answered at length. Then, striking himself on the forehead, he cried excitedly: 'Yes . . . yes . . . I know . . . I ask for pardon . . . and as I dare not ask it of God, I come where I can; I address myself to her who deigns to hear me, and perhaps I may obtain pardon. For it is not I who am the guiltiest, oh! believe me. It is the execrable Thierret who has done it all, he arranged everything. Left to myself, in my despair I should have killed myself; that would have ended it. He, on the contrary, he, the infamous depository of an infernal science, suggested to me the criminal idea of obtaining by a stratagem what had been refused to love. Thierret possessed the secret of deadening the mental faculties, of causing blood in the veins to be arrested, of stopping the beating of the heart. He had composed once before certain lozenges, a single one of which would cause insensibility. Yesterday he prepared a bouquet, which caused an intense lethargy to fall on whoever smelt it. What happened? . . . I cannot say exactly . . . for, I also, I wished to intoxicate myself with one of these powerful perfumes, which solace suffering, destroy the memory. Oh! why do I still suffer my pain and my remorse? . . . I desired to forget. . . I desired

to die, and now I know that I have committed a crime . . . an abominable crime . . . a disgraceful crime! . . . My God! is there no means of reparation? . . .'

"'There is one,' said my aunt resolutely. 'You can instantly marry my niece.'

"The blow was so terrible a one for me, that I could not speak, I could only clasp my hands beseechingly, imploring my aunt.

"'The thing must be done,' said she to me, 'you cannot hesitate to choose between this sacrifice and shame.'

"What more can I say?" continued the sobbing Fanfette; "I have not kept a lucid remembrance in my mind of that dreadful evening, I only know there was a crowd of people who smiled upon me, while I felt ready to die, that my wedding dress was actually put on without my knowledge, and that after an interview with the most important witnesses to the ceremony, to whom my aunt explained by a reason at once simple and likely, the change in the person of the bridegroom, my marriage was celebrated at midnight, just as had been originally arranged."

"Ah!" cried I, interrupting, "you can no longer call yourself Fanfette."

"That was my pet name."

"And you are? . . ."

"The Countess de Flégères."

"And we are now? . . ."

"In my own garden."

I remained silent for a moment, it all seemed so impossible, so incredible, so supernatural.

"And he?" I asked, after a minute or two's silence.

"Who? . . . he . . ."

"The wretch . . . the Count de Flégères."

"He is there, behold him . . ."

I raised my eyes. A man was walking towards us, down the magnificent avenue which faced us. I was wrong to say a *man*. It was a living skeleton. The skin of his face was, so to say, transparent, and one might have said that the bones had pierced this dry and insufficient envelope. Though about fifty years of age, he appeared seventy; his fleshless fingers gripped a stick, with a sort of fearful energy; without that stick he could not have walked. His clothes were black, and in perfect keeping with the rest of his personal appearance. To look at him, one would have supposed that he had vowed himself to an eternal mourning.

I was astonished at first to see Fanfette keep up a calm and careless attitude, in spite of his approach, but my astonishment was not of long duration.

He passed before us without seeming to see us, his eyes fixed on space, and he never even slackened his pace.

"My God!" said I to Fanfette when he had passed by, "he is mad, then? . . ."

"Yes," she replied, "as he said himself one day, in the only lucid interval that he ever had: 'Mad with happiness . . . and with remorse.'"

"But now," cried I, more and more puzzled, "does he know that he is your husband?"

"He has forgotten it. He now quite believes that I refused him my hand, and that I am the wife of the Baron de Lutz. This form of his madness commenced a year after our marriage. Watch him," continued she, pointing him out as he was crossing the lawn in the distance, "observe him well. He passes between his children without recognising them; for I became their mother, and he knows it not."

In saying these last words, tears fell from Fanfette's eyes, and she got up. I did the same.

The rest of the day passed in confidential talk in which the beautiful soul of this charming woman was revealed; she who would have deserved a heaven upon earth, and to whom fate had given nothing but misfortune and regrets.

In leaving her that evening to set out on my journey to Paris, I obtained the favour of being allowed to place a brotherly kiss on her angelic cheek, and I said to her:

"Adieu, madame, adieu! henceforward there will be on my calendar one more name, and when I have any favour to ask of Heaven, below my breath, I shall invoke Holy Fanfette."

CHAPTER XXXIX

History of the Danish doctor, John Kressmer—His science, his studies, his reputation—The court and the town make much of him—His spirit of research and invention—The dissecting-table—A blood-letting—Mathias Grafft—The resurrection of Lazarus—A private conversation between a generous doctor and a grateful man who has been hanged.

About that time there was a great deal of talk of a marvellous affair in Denmark, which caused a great deal of noise in Paris for a whole fortnight, which is a very long time indeed for France, that goodly country where everybody is so terribly fond of the unknown, the new, and the unexpected.

It was all about a *savant*, called Kressmer, who was pursued with gold and presents on the pretext, perhaps more specious than real, that he was causing science to advance.

Here is the history of the brave doctor, just as I heard it told at an evening entertainment at the house of the Grand Huntsman at Versailles:

Doctor John Kressmer had a great reputation, and the different faculties of Europe, who would have cried "Quack" if they had dared, were silent, and made the best of a bad bargain, while observing the

numberless favours with which princes, renowned for their wisdom and power, delighted in remunerating his labours, the value of which, it may as well be stated, they did not appreciate so highly. Professional jealousy, it may be said; so be it. Every day Kressmer saw the number of his supporters increase, and he was received at court as the hero of modern science, listened to as an oracle, surrounded, in one word, with those thousand and one triumphs, fit to still more inflame the zeal of a wise man, by appealing to his pride, which is his weak point.

Kressmer had already invented many things, each more beautiful than the last. He cured influenza by means of footbaths; he fought against rheumatism by causing violent perspirations; and he purified the blood of his patients by giving them potions to which he had given high-sounding names, but in which, as everybody supposed, there were large quantities of marsh-mallow, lime-blossom, and couch-grass.

The trumpet-blast of triumph resounded ever in his ears, and to the sounds of this charming music he led the quietest life it is possible to imagine.

Impelled by the all-powerful current of public approbation, the medical faculty of Copenhagen at length decided to recognise the transcendent merit of the celebrated John Kressmer by deciding that every unclaimed dead body should be adjudged to him for observation and study. Kressmer found himself, as a result of this decision, very frequently

alone with some of the greatest rescals in the kingdom. This prospect, which would have been sad enough to most people, seemed to him most delightful, because these chosen ones allowed him to give himself up to innumerable investigations upon the secret of the human machine, and assuredly there is this advantage in death, that it causes antecedents to be blotted out; and as the last hour strikes, the past disappears—the sharper, the sponger, and the loafer, once dead, are exactly in the same position as the carefully and splendidly embalmed king or emperor.

Kressmer took full advantage of his opportunities, both as a man of science and as an anatomist. He saw immediately that such opportunities would cause public attention to be still more drawn to him, and he determined to open in his rooms a theatre of comparative anatomy, where he would lecture, and thanks to which he could descend from his lofty pedestal of official scientist, in order to place his knowledge at the service of fashionable people, and initiate some of them into those secrets which can be told, without compromising the dignity of the teacher, to men who are anxious to obtain instruction, and even to ladies who wished to escape from the eternal round of their household occupations to study the interesting mysteries of dead nature and of the decomposition of matter. It must be well understood that the ladies were not to be admitted to the actual experiments

of the doctor in his amphitheatre, and that he merely intended to teach them a science which could only be attractive to them when cleverly disguised, and which would have been impossible to show them without some sort of precaution.

Everything succeeded perfectly.

Subjects for dissection abounded, and his labours were most fruitful in their results. The course of lectures commenced after a very short delay, and their success exceeded expectation.

Kressmer was regarded as the providence of Copenhagen. Money and honours were showered upon him; but he suffered from a sort of continual fever, which was caused, without doubt, by such a succession of successes. Poor doctor! with all his science, it would have been very disagreeable for him to have fallen ill of happiness and to have died from excess of prosperity. It was nothing; he was robust and strong. He resisted; Fortune had not yet tired of favouring him; she was determined to overload him with benefits. . . .

One day there was a wholesale execution at Copenhagen of certain rascals, who had on their consciences, one man a modest theft, another a little murder—in fact, a qualification for being hanged.

They had paid the forfeit. The newly-painted gallows had worked beautifully; the running knot had slipped successfully; and the three or four criminals, for whom so much expense had been gone

to for cord and carpentry, had grinned in the air, to the great delight of the crowd and amid the applause of those present.

The law was satisfied. . . . The illustrious Kressmer, to whom belonged by right the mortal remains of these odious rascals, had to be satisfied as well.

They were all brought to the dissecting-room, and then, according to custom, whenever John Kressmer intended serious study, they left the doctor alone in the midst of this interesting company.

The eyes of the *savant* were first attracted by one of the hanged, who was better-looking than the rest of his comrades. He was well-made, muscular, with a handsome face, whose expression had not put on the ugly grimace of the death struggle; he looked really tempting, and it was upon him that Kressmer resolved to commence operations.

"S'blood," said he, contemplating the magnificent being who had become his property, "he is a singularly well-preserved rascal. His flesh-tones have an admirable transparency, and one could almost fancy one sees the blood running through those cold veins. . . . It makes me almost want to be hanged myself. Oh, oh!" continued he, examining the ear of the dead man, "how is it that this vein seems swollen, as it would be in life? Let me make an incision. . . . We shall see what will happen."

He took his lancet and prepared to use it, muttering, "If I divide the artery, it will not very much matter, I think. . . . The hanged man does not often complain. . . . There . . . it is done. . . . Nothing . . . not a drop of blood! . . . By our Lady! but there ought to be; I don't know why I could have thought . . ."

Doctor Kressmer remained some time motionless, as though he were thinking of something else. At length, shaking off his reverie, he prepared to set to work calmly.

"Now, then . . . what shall I do with this handsome corpse, and on what part of this body shall the celebrated John Kressmer apply his mind's eye, in order to report to the learned Academy of Copenhagen? . . . Ah! of course . . . have I not promised to give them my ideas on the material nature, and on the psychological distribution of the human heart? That's it . . . I will go to work at once upon the heart of this hardened rascal. . . . Let us hope that he has a heart exactly like the rest of mankind. Oh! yes . . . I need not trouble about that. God has cast us all in the same mould, only some of us have not come out quite so well as others; it is that that causes the differences there are. . . . Satisfied with this reasoning, which has been given just as it came forth from the mind and mouth of John Kressmer, the doctor looked about him, searching for the instruments which were necessary in the dissecting-room. Not finding them, he slapped his forehead, saying:

"Of course, I left them yesterday in my instrument-case; I will go and look for them." He departed.

Then a strange phenomenon took place. A rapid shudder caused the skin of the executed man to wrinkle, a kind of spasm seemed to run along his limbs, and a jet of blood suddenly spurted on to his shoulder. The effect of the lancet puncture was at length produced, and, contrary to every probability, this bleeding *in extremis* had succeeded.

The man who had been hanged raised his two arms as a man does when yawning, and gave a long groan. He breathed with delight. Soon his eyes opened; he rose and sat up on the great table, which somewhat resembled a butcher's block, and on which there were red stains soaked into the cracks of the wood, marking the passage of the unhappy beings who had bequeathed to the venerable doctor as a souvenir some few drops of their blood, some a portion of their bones.

"B-r-r-r-r . . ." said the trembling man, his teeth rattling the while in a feverish fit. . . .

Then he stared around him in astonishment; he seemed to search in the most secret corners of his memory, in order to collect his last thoughts. Then, all of a sudden, as though he had got a luminous idea, he struck his forehead and cried:

"By all the devils in hell, I have come to life again!"

At these words he rose, danced gaily round the

dissecting-table, and stopped, his feet in the first position, simulating cleverly enough the pose of an opera-dancer.

The man who had been hanged was a careful person; he was also a being full of decency and propriety. He remembered that alone, abandoned as he was, he had need of resources, and finally, he was not in a costume fit to knock at any honest door. Thereupon, perceiving a handsome dressing-gown and watch, to which was attached a gold chain, very artistically carved, hanging on a nail, he took possession of both without ceremony, calculating with the one to hide the shortcomings of his toilet, and with the second to provide himself with necessaries of life.

In this costume he attempted to make off, probably from habit, perhaps because the hanging had rather stupefied him. He turned first towards one of the windows. But soon, thinking that the climb might be compromising, he turned calmly towards the door, determined to surmount every obstacle to escape from the house. The ungrateful rascal had forgotten that an unknown saviour had brought him back to life.

He was going out; his finger already pressed the latch of the door, when John Kressmer, who was returning with his box of instruments, flung it to from the other side.

In this way the doctor and the man who had been hanged met face to face; the man who had

been hanged seemed considerably embarrassed, while the doctor appeared thoroughly frightened. A conversation soon commenced. After the first moment of surprise it grew louder.

"Where the devil are you going to, rascal?"

"I am about to take a walk."

"In my dressing-gown?"

"It is not the custom to walk about in Copenhagen stark-naked."

"But my watch?"

"Well, I've got to know the time. . . ."

Kressmer understood from this rapid interchange of question and answer that he had not got to do with a fool, and that the rascal was very ready with his replies. An indescribable sentiment of curiosity took possession of him, and the thought prevented his giving up the rascal who had played him the trick to be carried off to prison.

This was his reflection.

From time immemorial people had busied themselves concerning death by strangulation, and about the time when Kressmer lived there were already many divergent opinions on the subject. Until then the matter had been argued in the schools, but no one arrived at a satisfactory conclusion. Besides, amidst all these arguments, so frequently stained with bitterness and passion, each man had proclaimed his system the right one, the only acceptable one; while discussion, which good people have compared to a torch, had not illuminated the matter.

"I have the truth in my hand," thought Kressmer, illuminated by one of those divine rays by which the great secrets of nature are revealed. "Here is one of those fearful scoundrels who can make the tiny stream of my fortune, which sparkles here and there with silver spangles, a real river in which roll waves of gold!"

And, dominated by this thought, he graciously approached the robber with a smile upon his lips.

"My friend, will you do something for me?"

"Anything, oh! master, if you will swear to save my hide from those hungry vultures of the Criminal Court, who pay me such unpleasant attentions."

"Your hide!" cried Kressmer, with peculiar unction, "your hide! . . . that will be my dearest article of property, and I swear to you, if you will only behave properly, to treat you like my own child. Your name?"

"They called me Mathias Grafft before I died. I am ready now to call myself anything you like."

"Yes, it is true, we must think about that. To begin, let me offer you a chair, and let us talk."

The resuscitated man sat himself down quite coolly, and the doctor began:

"There . . . are you quite comfortable? . . . You are neither too warm nor too cold? That's all right. Now listen and answer."

"I am all ears."

"You remember the moment that preceded your execution?"

"Perfectly. I was in a state of mortal fear before I put my head 'through the window.'"

"The deuce! That's a very great pity . . . for your recollections . . ."

"Will be quite lucid . . . do not be disquieted, my dear master . . . pray continue."

"What!" cried Kressmer, transported with joy; "you can tell me in its most minute details . . ."

"The history of my hanging? Doubtless I can, and I would not on any account be deprived of the pleasure . . ."

"The pleasure, you say?"

"An unequalled joy," cried the bandit. "Only fancy, master, that at the moment that they came to take me from my prison to lead me to the place of execution, I was dreaming of a magnificent enterprise, which ought to, in a few days, if it succeeded, place me and the whole of my life above the base necessities of the world. I was in bed, I slept, I was still thinking of my happiness. . . . What an awakening! My jailer had one of those atrocious faces which that sort of person has . . . he looked fitted for leading people to the gallows. I hardly listened to him, for I knew from his appearance that the song he was singing to me was a *de profundis*, and that it was all up with me. . . . I put on my ragged clothes, and after having ascended the stone staircase of my accursed dungeon, I saw once more the light of day, which was soon about to disappear for ever from my eyes. I came

forth, though, from the prison with an upright figure, I was not cast down; for, at the supreme moment, we are all comedians, and we love to get a round of applause when the curtain is about to fall on the last scene of the drama. I heard murmurs on every side as I passed. Some hurled curses at me, others pitied me; there were some among the crowd who smiled on me, the greedy and cruel smile. These were the curious, for whom the gallows is a show, who study the contortions of the man who is condemned to die as they would examine the gambols and tricks of a diver. Four gibbets had been prepared since day-break . . . to their summits they attached three of my comrades, who had been condemned when I was, whence it resulted, that before performing myself, I could gratify myself at my ease with the saddening appearance of the performance I was about to under-take, as soon as it should be my turn. My turn did come, as a matter of fact more quickly even than I should have desired, and I had the satisfaction of hearing a loud shout rising from the bosom of the attentive crowd. Evidently I was about to attain an enthusiastic success. I was certain of that. . . . The executioner, who had strong wrists, seized me by the shoulders, and lightly and adroitly he caused me to twirl, so that shouts of laughter rang out at once from every direction. I ground my teeth with rage; but I had to be resigned, and in less than a minute, I felt my neck caught in the noose and my

feet dancing in the air. I was floating in space. . . . Bravos commenced once more to be roared by the delighted mob . . ."

"Could you still hear them?" interrupted Kressmer, who was attentively listening to every word.

"Like a distant noise," cried he who had been hanged. "Like a dying echo. . . . Nevertheless, that same surprise which caused you to interrupt me, dear doctor, seized me at that moment that I was not yet quite dead, and, by a strange activity of sensibility which I had never experienced before, I was able to submit my present state to a careful analysis. . . . That astonishes you . . . but it is exactly as I tell you, nevertheless. I knew at once that I was not dead, that was a physical defect caused by the strength of my nature, or by some mistake of the hangman. I concluded to accept the latter theory, because I had noticed that my three comrades had the rope tightly round their necks, like a ring upon a finger, while I felt that my running knot had caught upon my jaw, and had so slipped almost to the crown of my occiput. I was only half-strangled, and I still breathed."

"But you suffered horribly, I suppose?" said Kressmer, with redoubled interest.

"That's just where you deceive yourself," said the man who was telling his story. "As soon as I got used to my original position, and my head got fixed, I entered into a sort of fairy-like existence of which it

would be impossible to give you a real idea. I floated in the air, and I seemed to inhale a perfumed atmosphere, in the midst of which I was borne upon invisible wings. Although I was suffering from a certain amount of pain, I seemed to be inspiring delicious exhalations of unknown perfumes. Every nerve, every muscle stretched itself with a delightful dilatation. . . . I was as strong as a lion, as light as a bird. . . . I saw beautiful scenery, immense rocks, thundering and deep waterfalls, over which I floated as an eagle of the forests. . . . I was no longer a man, I was a god. . . ."

"And when they took you down from the gibbet?"

"Then there was a change of scene," answered the man who had been hanged, sadly. "I saw nothing more, I heard nothing more . . . I was but a corpse, fit for fattening the crows, but which it was considered more sensible to send to you as a subject for dissection to be experimented upon. It is, doubtless, thanks to you that I am on my legs again. For pity's sake, doctor, don't deprive yourself of the honour of so wonderful a cure by giving me back to the hangman a second time. He would be capable of taking his revenge by hanging me better the second time than he did the first. . . ."

"Do not be uneasy," said Kressmer, who was reflecting very seriously.

The man who had been resuscitated awaited the doctor's decision with respectful but anxious silence.

At length the latter woke from his reverie and cried with transport:

"My friend, I will make your fortune!"

"That is a thing I cannot refuse."

"You will be called Lazarus . . . the name fits your circumstances."

"It is a good name for a man who has been resuscitated. . . . Master, I accept the name of Lazarus!"

"And I attach you to my person . . . you will be boarded and lodged."

"Very good . . . very good . . ." interrupted the new Lazarus. You have done me such a good turn that I can trust you thoroughly, and I agree to everything in advance. But what do you want me to do?"

"That you will know in good time."

CHAPTER XL

Continuation and end of the history of the Danish doctor, John Kressmer—Whither the passion for science may lead us—Death of John Kressmer—Mathias Grafft, Baron de Carniol.

THE police were suspicious at Copenhagen. Dr. Kressmer had not thought fit to give publicity to the strange thing that had occurred at his house, for the same fear that Lazarus had expressed, relative to the hangman, who, like Acheron, does not easily abandon his prey; the same fear had closed the doctor's mouth and caused him to invent a lie, which after all was a very innocent one. He pretended that a certain *savant*, a friend of his, who lived at Buda in Hungary, had sent him, on account of the rarity of his case, one of the patients from his own hospital, in order that he might treat him for an affection whose nature he himself had been unable to understand. Thanks to this assertion, which nobody thought of disputing, Lazarus remained shut up more than a month in a room where Kressmer alone was accustomed to enter, and there, having allowed his beard and hair to grow, he had become quite unrecognisable.

This month had been put to good use; for I, who

tell the story, knew what everybody in Copenhagen was ignorant of, that many experiments had taken place on the pupil by his master, with which they were both perfectly satisfied. Lazarus, whose confidence in his master was without bounds, had allowed himself to be hanged several times, and at each of these experiments he had again felt the same delightful symptoms which have been detailed above. Every time the doctor had cut him down in time; hence it resulted that this trifling exercise, which never lasted more than five or six minutes, never prevented the subject from eating, drinking and laughing as though he had been a man of fortune.

Kressmer had made immense and incredible progress in performing these experiments. He had succeeded, by means of a well-padded support and sort of elastic lever on which the top of the head rested, in obtaining the delightful effects which Lazarus had described, and even in getting rid of the sort of momentary annoyance caused by an unaccustomed position, which would occasion cramp in a delicate person. His new whim took up his entire time, and he soon began to neglect his royal patients in order to thoroughly study, what was so very interesting from more than one point of view, the real effects of strangulation upon man. . . . Who would have believed it? The purity of his zeal had not so much success at Copenhagen as he could have desired. People began to complain of the doctor's

frequent absences, and a certain bigoted faction, which at that time dominated the court, declared that there was sorcery in the matter.

John Kressmer was obliged to fly his country. . . .

But his exile, instead of being the cause of his ruin, was the signal for still more startling triumphs.

As can be guessed, Kressmer took poor Lazarus with him; the man had become his assistant, and well-nigh his friend. This last title, although it may seem at first sight exaggerated, was justified by his blind submission and boundless devotion.

It was a voyage of triumph, a perpetual shower of gold. Germany, Holland and France received Kressmer as a brilliant innovator, who could open unknown paths to science, and notwithstanding the secret persecutions of the Jesuits and other scrupulous guardians of the faith, who would not accept as possible and true anything but the resurrection of their Divine Master, our fortunate doctor had not to complain of a single mortification or serious obstacle.

Borne on the wings of success, he at last reached England. England was the country of men really anxious for instruction, and eminently thirsting for knowledge. The doctor's arrival there was an important public event. He was well received by the learned, spoilt by those in power; John Kressmer could well believe that he found the most suitable place to pitch his tent, where he would be secure

from evil-speaking and envy. In London there happened what had happened nowhere else. The curious were not satisfied with being present at his experiments. Several Englishmen, who wished to know and penetrate everything in personal experiences, desired that Lazarus should yield his place, and that they should try the running knot themselves. Everything went well, resurrections were numerous, hymns of praise resounded in the doctor's sanctuary, and there came a time when he did not know how to satisfy everybody. In this state of things, the amount of his wealth became day by day more gigantic. Then came a thought, an annoying and sad thought; he said to himself, this man with no children and no relatives: "After me, what will become of the fortune I have so laboriously amassed?" That was certainly a matter for reflection. He took a whole week to consider this strangest and most contradictory of projects.

He first thought of leaving his entire wealth to the man who, more expert than himself, in place of giving life to a badly hanged man, should find the means of resuscitating the dead. The thing, after what he had done himself, no longer appeared impossible.

He thought of endowing academies, of founding decennial prizes and giving scholarships.

His self-love was for an instant flattered by the idea of making some earthly king his universal

legatee, conditionally on his agreeing to protect really wise men.

But all of a sudden, struck by a bright idea, he recognised that he was seeking afar what he had at hand, and his good sense made him recognise that it was much more logical, and much more natural, to bequeath his fortune to the man who had enabled him to gain it.

One day, then, he summoned Lazarus and told him of his intentions. The poor young fellow, who had amended his life and who no longer retained any of those little natural infirmities which had caused justice to pursue him, was deeply moved, and burst into tears. He did not deserve, he said, such great good fortune. To which Dr. Kressmer, whom philosophy and medicine had rendered a little mad, answered with the greatest solemnity:

"There is no such thing as chance on the earth; Providence decided that we should be the two instruments of the most wonderful discovery ever made by human mind. What I give you I really owe you, for one of us could not exist without the other, and we are each the complement of the other."

Though one might charge Kressmer with falling into a ridiculous excess of feebleness as to his co-operator Lazarus, yet, strange to say, he had never reason to repent having given him this proof of affection. The devotion of Lazarus increased with the esteem in which he was held by the doctor.

These things having taken place, they set forth upon a new trip. This time they started for Russia. Behold them on the road. . . . *Bon voyage!*

Savants are like sick people; they are subject to fever. That of Dr. Kressmer soon became inquieting. After having hanged Englishmen, who desired it, he took into his head to hang Russians, who strongly objected; then, when he could not obtain men—dogs, cats, and even birds. . . . Then he took it into his head to hang himself.

After all, what was more just? The least he could do, after having procured so many exquisite delights for others, was at last to consider himself. He communicated his intention to Lazarus.

"It is a sublime idea!" cried Lazarus. "After the operation, you will be able to speak yet more learnedly upon the subject, and you will have the merit of having experimented on yourself, which always inspires more confidence. . . ."

"But you understand," said the doctor, "five or six minutes, no more."

"Be at ease, my dear master, I have seen you operate so often that I am sure of myself. I am quite at your orders."

The preparations did not take long. The doctor having once taken the idea into his head, gave those by whom he was surrounded no peace. He turned out the curious and shut himself up with Lazarus, being impatient to enjoy himself at last in practising

those ineffable delights which till now he had only tasted in theory. . . .

The experiment commenced.

Lazarus, when he saw his master hanging from the gallows, felt a thrill of joy. This good servant was doubtless thinking of the numerous pleasures of all sorts which the excellent doctor was about to enjoy.

"Keep quite still, sir," repeated he for the last time, seing that Kressmer made him a sign; "you shall be thoroughly satisfied with me."

Lazarus never took his eyes off Dr. Kressmer.

All the expected symptoms were produced one after the other, in perfect order, and with marvellous regularity. A few broken sighs indicated that the subject was artificially proceeding from life to death. It only now remained to follow certain mysterious and indispensable practices that Kressmer had thousands of times demonstrated to Lazarus, in order to combat the effects of a too prolonged suspension. It was equally urgent, in order to complete the operation, to blow in the nostrils of the doctor a certain quantity of rarefied air, and to tickle the palms of his hands from time to time.

Can it be believed? Lazarus, absorbed in silent contemplation, forgot these portions of the experiment. The doctor seemed so happy, and the good servant had so often enjoyed the delights of these admirable ecstasies, that he gazed upon his master

with the pleasure of which there was no outward sign, but which was doubtless concentrated in his soul.

Nevertheless, the seconds and the minutes flew by.

Had Lazarus lost his head?

That is a question very difficult to decide. All that can be said is, for the sake of clearness and the edification of the reader, that at about the end of an hour, having prudently assured himself that the doctor had taken such a considerable dose of pleasure that he would not want to begin over again, he searched every part of the house and filled his pockets, till they would hold no more, with valuables, and that then he forced the writing-table, and therein he found the deed of gift which has been spoken of above.

Then, having wiped away a tear which had been wrung from him by the sad spectacle of the deceased, whom by this time he had carefully placed on his bed, he started off to find a notary who should put things in order and secure for him legal possession of his inheritance.

We must do justice to Lazarus: the funeral of the celebrated Dr. Kressmer was very magnificent indeed. As he paid for these obsequies, it would be unfair not to notice his disinterested conduct.

There was a good deal of talk over Dr. John Kressmer's grave, where the crowd spoke its mind pretty freely.

The learned said:

"Here is sufficient proof that his system was egregious folly. . . . He was the victim of his own presumption and pride. The man who lies there fears nothing."

"Take care," said the people who blindly believed in him; "take care, he may come back to life yet. . . ."

"He was losing money," said some of those who know everything and are nearly always deceived. "He had lost his practice, so he committed suicide."

Lazarus alone, like a wise man, listened to all this, but said nothing. He alone, notwithstanding these numerous different opinions, kept his to himself. . . . He profited by the noise of the chatterers to quietly make his escape. . . .

A year afterwards, a man, who bought a seigneural estate in the mountains of Styria, to which was attached the right of bearing its name as a title of nobility, made himself remarkable by his charities and his exact fulfilment of all the duties of religion.

They called that man the Baron of Carniol . . . but (it may be told in confidence to you, dear reader) he was Mathias Grafft, or, to speak more correctly, Lazarus, the man who had been hanged.

CHAPTER XLI

Behind the convent of the Minimes—A woman watches and follows me—Her singular manœuvres—She accosts me—She discloses her object — The very original manner of Mademoiselle Marinette—Her interrogatory—Am I fond of dark women? Do I like fair ones?—A strange initiation—I make no resistance—The coach—Marinette bandages my eyes — The agreement between Marinette and myself — Whither am I going?—My entrance into the house which I ought not to see—A fairy palace—The mysterious beauty —A *tête-à-tête* such as I have never had before—The indescribable beauty of the unknown—A happiness that I had not expected—I wonder at my great good fortune—I enjoy my happiness as if I had really deserved it—Strange advice —I swear to be discreet—The dream vanishes—Marinette once more—The eight hundred pistoles—We shall meet to-morrow!

One evening, as I was walking behind the convent of the Minimes, in the Place Royale, a most unexpected adventure happened to me. It was the drollest, the most incredible in the world. The reader shall judge if I exaggerate.

It was almost night. The last rays of day gave me sufficient light to distinguish surrounding objects; and I noticed that I was followed, watched, or perhaps it would be more correct to say dogged, by a young woman, who was alert, lively, and affable. Ever and

anon she would look up into my face, and then she would drop modestly behind, as if to examine my appearance, to study my walk, to make certain if I were a nobleman or a mere ruffler.

On whose account was she making this inspection?

Had I, by any possibility, an unfortunate resemblance to some one else, which might cause me, the most tranquil and inoffensive of men, to be taken for a conspirator?

Did my features displease this delicious little waiting-maid?

Was there anything ridiculous about my dress?

Was it love that made this delicious little promenader so excessively lively?

All these questions gave me sufficient mental occupation, and, as may be fancied, I did not find a satisfactory answer to one of them.

The persistence of the woman did not lessen in the least.

I walked, she walked.

I stopped, she stopped.

I was proceeding that evening to the neighbourhood of the Palais-Royal, and I had not taken a sedan-chair, in order to attract attention less and to preserve my incognito.

From the Minimes to the Palais-Royal the young woman followed me without the slightest hesitation.

Her course of action threatened to result in nothing, because the house to which I was going

was situated in the Rue Saint-Honoré, close to the Croix du Trahoir, and I was just about to enter when my persevering young companion, making up her mind at length, said to me in a low voice :

" Sir, or rather monseigneur, for I believe I know who you are, have you leisure to listen to a few words ? "

" That depends on the nature of your few words," said I, turning to her.

" Oh, there is nothing disagreeable about them, I swear to you, monseigneur, and I will bet you in advance a hundred good French pistoles against a German thaler that you will not be sorry when you have heard them."

" Well, I am all attention."

" Oh, I beg pardon ! " said the girl who had accosted me, throwing a cautious glance around, " there are people who might be listening, and what I have to say to you is for your private ear alone."

This preamble puzzled me considerably.

" If you like," said she, " we will go along the quay-side, under the wall of the Louvre. A few minutes more and night will have fallen ; the darkness will protect us."

" Ah, bah ! my dear girl," I replied laughingly, " you make a great fuss about your few words, and I begin to think that your few words will multiply themselves *ad infinitum*. Be frank, you want to talk seriously with me ? "

"Well, to be frank, yes," she replied; "also the affair is a serious one, and I have a good many questions to ask you. 'A few words' was my way of putting it."

"Without doubt a *few* words would be sufficient for any woman. So be it; let us go. Let us walk towards the quay, my dear. . . . What is your name?"

"Marinette, at your service."

"Very good. As soon as we reach the quay we can chat at our ease."

We walked along the enclosure, Marinette and I, towards the Quai du Louvre.

As we had hoped, it had grown completely dark when we arrived.

I stopped about the middle of the quay and said to Marinette:

"The sky is black enough now, there is no one in sight, and it is hardly likely that we shall be betrayed by an indiscreet echo; say what you have to say, my child."

Marinette, who it was easy to see was a waiting-maid in a good family, looked round her suspiciously, and wiping her face with her handkerchief to give herself courage, said:

"Monsieur, you really are the Duc de Roquelaure, are you not?"

"Unless I was changed at nurse, I am the man."

"There are so many Roquelaures."

"Yes, but there is but one duke."

"And it is you who are the duke?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt of it."

"Are the tales they tell about your principles in love true?"

"Well, that depends on what they say."

"They say . . ." said Marinette, with hesitation.

"Oh, don't be afraid, go on, go on!"

"You won't take offence, duke?"

"Not I! Say what you have got to say."

"Well, duke, they say that in matters of love you are the most accommodating and least scrupulous man in France. You are looked upon as one of those fervent worshippers of Venus who adore all women, and whose homage, ever ready, ever new, is willingly rendered to whoever is young, witty, and handsome. That, duke, is your portrait. Is it like you?"

"Yes, only I think it is a little flattered. But what do you want to arrive at? Are you giving me a lesson in morality, or are you paying me a compliment?"

"Oh, I am merely asking for information, duke."

"And why do you ask for information?"

"You shall know anon."

Marinette now grew bold enough to clutch my arm, and then leaning forward, whispered confidentially into my ear:

"Duke, do you like dark women?"

"Do I like them! Yes, for they are what I understand best in the world . . . dark women, dear Marinette, are to my mind the truly, the only lovable women in the world. Fair women have their value; more than once in my life I have proved in the most convincing manner that they have the right to honest people's esteem; dark women are superior to them, as the angels of Paradise are to the fallen ones. You see a dark woman pass in the street . . . she gives you one look . . . how many things there are in that simple look! How many promises there are in that beautiful black hair, which presages unutterable things! And that hard and firm flesh on which a kiss sounds so well! Dark women, Marinette, are the queens of creation."

"I am charmed to find you so favourably disposed, duke; nothing could have happened better. You say that you like dark women; that is most important. Do you like them when they are twenty years of age?"

"Twenty years of age! Marinette. Do you want to drive me mad with your ridiculous questions?"

"Perhaps you think that twenty is too old?"

"I think . . . that it is very naughty of you, a person whom I do not know, to amuse yourself at my expense."

"Oh! duke, can you think . . ."

"No, certes, I don't think . . . and it is just because I don't think, that I fancy you are trying to make a fool of me."

"There is nothing of that sort about me, I swear; and if you will only have patience and wait for the end, I am sure you will do me justice."

"Very good . . . I *will* have patience, I will wait for the end."

"Duke, will you allow me one more question?"

"Is this sort of thing going on very long?"

"No, it is my last. Are you discreet?"

"Yes . . . when my honour is trusted."

"Your answer is quite satisfactory," said Marinette, "and now will you be good enough to follow me?"

"Where to?"

"That is the one thing I am forced to conceal."

"But I have eyes."

"No, you have not; for if you consent to be guided by me, we shall get into a coach, which awaits us at the Croix du Trahoir, and I shall bandage your eyes."

"Ah, ha! This is getting rather mysterious."

"Does the mystery frighten you?"

"Zounds, no!"

"Well then, shall we start?"

"I follow you!"

Marinette started at a brisk walk, and I regulated my pace by hers. No sooner had we arrived at the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, than I saw her make a sign to a coachman, who slept, or rather pretended to sleep, upon his box; for he immediately jumped down to

open the door for us. We got in; I took the back seat, and my little companion sat opposite me.

We rode along silently. It was not very difficult for me to see that I was being driven back along the Rue Saint-Antoine. We soon reach the Minimes. Then Marinette offered me a large handkerchief, and begged me to bandage my eyes with it.

It had been one of our conditions, one of the articles of our treaty; I could not refuse to submit to it. Therefore, without further to-do, I got ready to play my *rôle*, with the best grace in the world, in this mysterious game of blind man's buff. The pretty little maid was good enough to help me to knot the handkerchief. I begged her not to tie it too tightly; being a well brought-up girl, she attended to my wishes.

"You can see nothing?" she said.

"Absolutely nothing."

"Raise your head a little, please duke."

"What for?"

"In order to make quite sure that you may not, by means of peeping, see what it is desired to hide from you."

"My eyes, dear Marinette, would not commit such a felony; in sooth, you misjudge them. For if by chance, a very unlikely chance, the bandage were to fall, be you quite sure those very eyes, whose discretion you suspect, would immediatly close, without being ordered to do so."

"I believe what you say, duke, because I have every confidence in you, and we must trust your discretion."

"You should have thought of that before, Marinette."

"Excuse me, duke."

Five minutes passed thus. It seemed to me that the horses did not go so quickly, and that we were entering one of those streets in the Marais which are so narrow and tortuous that the houses seem about to fall upon each other; this idea came to my mind from hearing the coachman continually warning the foot-passengers. Immediately afterwards we drove on at the ordinary pace, which made me guess that we were in a larger street.

"Shall we be soon there?" I asked.

"In a moment, your grace."

"You see, Marinette, when one's eyes are bandaged time seems very long."

"You will be recompensed, your grace, by the marvels you will be permitted to gaze upon in a few minutes."

"Marinette, you pique my curiosity, you exalt my imagination, you inflame my heart! Tell me, will what I am going to see give me such great pleasure?"

"Assuredly, unless you have exceedingly bad taste."

"And to whom shall I owe this great happiness?"

"Somewhat to chance, a little to me."

"To thee?"

"To me."

"Well, Marinette, if it is all true, and if you are not making a fool of me, as I cannot recompense the services of Chance, who is an impalpable being, it is naturally you who must profit by generosity. From this moment I wish to pay something on account of my debt towards you. Take it; this purse contains a lot of crowns. But whatever the sum it may contain, I promise you three times as much if I am satisfied with the entertainment. It will be your place then to let me know the amount of my debt to you. You understand, three times as much!"

"Perfectly, duke, perfectly!"

And then Mademoiselle Marinette weighed with nimble fingers the purse which had just passed from my hands into hers.

On a sudden the carriage stopped.

The coachman got down. He opened the door and quickly lowered the steps.

"Be good enough, duke," said Marinette to me, "to stand perfectly still for an instant; I am going to pay this good fellow."

She did as she had said. From the exclamation of pleasure which the charioteer had uttered, I could easily guess that he had been well paid for his trouble. He clambered up on his box and drove off at a gallop. When the noise of the wheels was lost in the distance, the little maid said to me:

"Duke, pray don't think me impertinent, but it would be just as well if you gave me your arm."

"Impertinent! charming Marinette; I am delighted to be your cavalier. We have not, then, yet reached our destination?"

"The little that remains is not worth talking about," said Marinette. "But you understand, duke, that it was very necessary that the driver of that hired coach should not see where we were going. Remember that we have a secret to keep, a most important secret. If we take people of that sort into our confidence, the fat would be soon in the fire. Enter, enter, here we are."

The wise Marinette was armed with a bunch of keys, whose significant rattling I heard distinctly; with them she opened the door. The hand of my conductress, which, by-the-way, was very soft, guided me through endless courts, vestibules and passages. We wandered through these for several minutes. From the silence which seemed to reign, I supposed I was in some large mansion, belonging to one of the best families of the day.

In such a case, and under the exceptional circumstances in which I found myself, I was bound to fancy so.

I had to discover whether I was in error or if I had guessed the truth. While I was thinking about these things, my foot slipped, and I nearly fell full length.

"Oh! take care," murmured Marinette, in a tone of interest, which I looked upon as a good augury.

"What is that?"

"It is a little staircase, duke."

"You should have warned me."

"I really forgot it, duke."

"One more piece of forgetfulness like that will break my neck, Marinette. Your little staircase seems to me rather long."

"Thirty-two steps and we are at the top."

"That's all very well, but what shall we find when we do get to the top of this Jacob's ladder?"

Marinette used the most discreet, the most tantalising, and the most solemn tone in answering me:

"Heaven!"

After such an assurance, I really had hardly any right to grumble. But my impatience showed itself in my answer to the young Abigail.

"Heaven! I accept it," I cried; "but since you are a Saint Peter in petticoats, don't make me languish too long for it."

"Silence!"

"I am as silent as the grave."

"Walk on tiptoe."

"Like that?"

"That's capital."

"Shall I have to go on wearing this annoying bandage much longer?"

"I am taking it off."

The bandage was removed, and my eyes were dazzled. I found myself in a little gallery, the walls of which were covered with magnificent stuffs, embroidered in gold thread with beautiful imitations of flowers. The furniture was of ebony, delicately carved, the curtains of the richest damask, and magnificent chandeliers threw a pure and sparkling light over this charming room.

For an instant I was so astonished that I was puzzled to know what had happened.

I was stupefied and giddy.

But soon coming to myself and rubbing my eyes, I began to look around me.

I turned.

Marinette had disappeared.

If one must tell the truth, I was rather annoyed. Marinette had taken the greatest possible care of me, and I confess that I should have been very glad to enter with her into what she called paradise. It was she who had used the word, and pronounced it with a tone which permitted no mistake. And now, at last, I was to have proof of her sincerity or her deception. The surroundings, I am forced to confess, had a good deal of the celestial about them. But to complete the simile an angel was required.

Was the angel going to appear?

I made a minute inspection of every nook and corner of the room. I saw nothing. There was

not the least cloud, not even one of those charming cherubic visages which artists represent with glories round their heads. Nothing moved but the flames of the wax-lights, and I began to feel lonely and bored.

I advanced.

A velvet curtain hid a door, which evidently opened into another apartment.

I raised the curtain, and stopped.

This time it was not admiration I felt—it was ecstasy.

The room which I entered was a veritable fairy-chamber, and what made it all the more charming was that the fairy herself was there.

Imagine a round saloon, hung with white satin, lit by lamps with blue flames, heavy with perfumes which intoxicated one and caused one's heart to beat. Imagine, in addition, a woman as handsome as Venus or Diana, stretched at full length upon a sofa of rose-coloured velvet, her hair flowing loosely, her eyes lost in a profound reverie—then you will have some idea of the magic spectacle which astounded my eyes, and before which I remained lost in surprise, pleasure, and delight for several minutes.

I drew near.

The beautiful dreamer rose with a little cry.

But, all at once, she said in a voice that was almost calm :

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur . . ."

"Madame . . ."

"You are Monsieur le Duc de Roquelaure, are you not?"

"Ah! you know my name?"

She blushed.

"That is to say," she murmured, "I know . . . or, rather, I had been told . . ."

"I have the happiness of being in your presence, madame, and that is one of those pieces of good luck which needs no explanation. Nevertheless, as I came here by a somewhat original path, and as I find myself here by a chance which I do not quite understand, I should feel a very great satisfaction in knowing who you are."

"Oh, sir!" she cried, growing pale as death, "it is the only thing I must beg you not to demand of me."

"The only thing," thought I to myself. "Then I am allowed to demand anything except that. Things look promising. After all, what does her name matter."

She pointed to a chair, and took her place once more upon the sofa. I seated myself close to her.

"If it is forbidden to know her name whose beauty has made such an impression on my mind, madame, no one can prevent my retaining within my heart the memory of her charms and the grace of her features. That remembrance will be my religion, a religion to which I shall be for ever faithful."

"If I dared ask you for a second favour," replied my unknown, lowering her eyes, "it would be to promise me, on the contrary, to forget everything from to-morrow."

"What!" I cried. "Am I never to see you again, madame?"

"Never!"

"But why?"

"Because to-morrow at break of day I shall leave for one of the frontier provinces of France, where I must live in future in an old château lost in a desert, far from my friends, without being able to see anyone, without being able to enjoy any of those pleasures to which I am entitled by my birth, my age, and my position."

"You are, then, the victim of a horrible persecution!" cried I, clasping my hands in horror.

"No, duke; I am simply under the tutelage of high and powerful relatives, who pretend that they treat me thus in the interest of my fortune and happiness."

As she said the words, she sighed sadly, and I saw a tear fall from her eyes.

The riddle had become more difficult to guess than ever.

"You are hiding the truth from me," I said; "you are unhappy. But, really, what right have I to your confidence, save from my presence here? Such a favour could not have been conferred except with *some* motive . . ."

"Oh! do not seek to penetrate it. It is impossible for me to explain it; and if by any chance independent of my will the secret should be unveiled in my presence, you would see me die of shame at your feet."

At these words she rose, and I did the same.

All on a sudden, she was seized with sudden weakness, and I felt her fall into my arms.

That posture rendered her yet more delightful in my eyes. There she was, close to me, reposing like some creeper blown by a tempest, pale, inanimate, voiceless. Her half-closed lips seemed to appeal to mine. . . . I had not the strength to resist. . . . I ardently embraced her.

The kiss reanimated her.

Her eyelids, heavy with an adorable languor, rose, and her looks seemed to say:

"Dare! . . . you can dare everything. I have neither the wish nor the courage to resist."

The reader knows me well enough to be quite sure that I was not the man to be deaf to such an unequivocal provocation. A philosopher who was inclined to self-analysis would perhaps wish to know, before making up his mind to be happy, the why and wherefore of everything — why he was loved, and how it came about, and on what such tenderness was based, and whither these unexpected delights would lead him.

There are such people, people who hesitate, people who reflect, who doubt, who suspect, who

create phantoms for themselves, in order to hunt them, who, in a word, if the end of the world had arrived, would phlegmatically pass the whole of eternity in walking round Paradise without daring to enter it.

I have a horror of such over-particular persons, their hearts are too irresolute.

I know not how to bargain with danger; nor do I ever deny myself well-earned pleasure.

This woman belonged to me by the right of an inevitable fatality, or by the right of a chance meeting.

Be it chance or be it destiny, I thanked the occult power to which I was indebted for so much and unexpected good luck. I only thought of rendering myself worthy, and in that way justify the preference of which I had become the object.

Oh! happy hour, in each minute of which I tasted, as it were, a crumb of ambrosia destined to gradually increase my passion, by what words and in what language can I ever describe it! Hour of pleasure and forgetfulness, would it not be profaning my memory by a description to those who are curious, to those who are indifferent?

No! when I shall have told my readers how modest this girl of twenty was in the midst of her passion; when I shall have described the magnificent head of hair, which floated over her shoulders, her cheeks tinted with the blush of happiness, her palpitating bosom, her languishing eyes, and her arms,

which clutched me, unworthy as I was, in a celestial embrace, even then they would know nothing, they would feel nothing of that divine ambrosia whose delights I had tasted during an hour that seemed all too short; they would not even have a shadow, a copy, a reflection, an inkling of the truth! . . .

After so exciting a scene, after such intoxicating gambols, we found ourselves once more seated on the sofa, our fingers interlaced, gazing into each other's eyes and murmuring incomprehensible words. My beautiful unknown seemed to have recovered all her confidence and all her serenity.

I wanted to speak. With a gesture, she begged me to allow her to do so, and I bent over her lovingly, showing that I was only too ready to listen.

"You do not know who I am," she said to me, "and I know who you are. My only excuse is in this single word: I am a woman; that fact enables me to demand a boundless discretion from you, while there is nothing binding upon me."

I could not suppress a smile.

"I understand why you laugh," she continued sweetly. "You think that I should never be seized with the whim, boasting of what has taken place to-night, and your smile signifies that I shall not have much trouble in keeping a secret which can only compromise myself. Perhaps you are right, although one never knows what the future conceals, and to what strange necessities one may find oneself forced to obey some day or other . . ."

"In that case, and if circumstances compel you," I cried, "pray believe that I shall be as ever ready to support you with my word as to defend you with my sword. The secret is yours, not mine. You alone have the right to divulge it, while I am bound in honour to be silent. I hope that you do not do me the injustice of doubting me. Under such circumstances, a simple indiscretion would be an infamous treason."

"And so you swear an absolute discretion?"

"Be content with a simple promise. One does not demand an oath from a man unless one doubts him."

"And if ever—for one must take every precaution—if ever in society, wherever you should chance to meet me . . ."

"My heart would beat, my happiness would choke me; I should grow pale with joy . . ."

"Imprudent man!"

"But at the same time I should turn away; I should retire without speaking to, without recognising you."

"Before asking you that question," she said, "before having received your answer, I knew that I could fearlessly trust in your delicacy and in your loyalty."

I thanked her with a look.

"Do you wish for proof? Behold it!" she continued; and raising one of the sofa cushions, she

showed me a little mask of black velvet. "Here is the inexorable guardian which I purposed to use to spare my blushes; but I remembered with whom I had to deal, and I thought of the reputation for devotion and for an excellent heart which is attached to the name of Roquelaure. I said to myself, 'There is one man in the world who, owing to a concatenation of circumstances, which it is impossible for me to relate just now, will have the right to look upon me as the lowest and vilest of lost women . . .'"

I interrupted her at those words by covering her little feet with kisses.

"'Well,'" she said, with inexpressible dignity, "'I will not hide myself from this man . . . he shall see my face, he shall know me; and when I have confided my honour to his mercy, I will beg him to keep my secret, and he will keep it.'"

I flung myself at her feet, I protested my unchangeable devotion, and swore to keep in my remembrance the likeness of her features as though they had been those of a saint. . . . In my turn, I begged her to pardon my hardy temerity.

She did not answer me.

I looked up.

She was no longer there!

Nothing can paint my despair. I searched for her, I called aloud, I desired to pursue her.

The sound of a voice stopped me.

"Where are you going, please, duke?"

"What! 'tis you, Marinette, what are you doing here?"

"I have come to guide you to the street-door, just as I guided you from the street-door hither."

"But I don't want to go."

"You've got to, duke."

"Be off with you, I am going to stay!"

"Oh! and your promise," murmured a sweet and charming voice behind the door.

"Your promise, duke? It is true enough that you did refuse to swear."

"I go! I go!" I cried, thoroughly ashamed of myself, and following Marinette.

The unknown had recalled me to my duty. I rushed down the stairs four at a time.

"Monsieur le duc! monsieur le duc!" cried the now thoroughly frightened Marinette.

"What do you want now?"

"Don't you perceive that you have forgotten something?"

"Forgotten what?"

"The bandage for your eyes."

"Has it got to be put on again?"

"Why should I have made a blind man of you in coming in, if in going out I were going to leave you in possession of that dangerous sight of yours?"

"You are quite right, Marinette; I pray you do your duty, and do it quickly; I want to be alone that I may think of all that has been said to me, of all

that I have seen, that I may ponder over it at my ease, and that, after having enjoyed the reality of happiness, I may be happy once more by remembering my past joys."

"I did not deceive you, did I?" said Marinette, bandaging my eyes just as she had bandaged them in the coach.

"No, indeed! what you told me was far below the truth!"

"Ah, my mistress is a charming woman!"

"She is an angel!"

"You are quite right, duke."

"Ah, Marinette, supposing I were to go back again."

"For what?"

"Just to bid her one last adieu!"

"It is impossible."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"You think she would not care to see me?"

"It is not that. But that which was feasible just now is no longer so."

"Is that quite decisive?"

"Altogether."

"Well, quick march!"

"Monsieur le duc, you say 'quick march,' but you don't march at all."

"It is quite true, lead me . . . and then I shall be obliged to follow you."

" Excellent, this way, monsieur le duc; take care, there is a step."

" Thanks, and where are we now? "

" We are at the street-door."

" Have you the key? "

" Of course I have."

" Are we in the street now? "

" We are, indeed."

" And are you going to lead me like this very far? "

" As far as ever I can, monsieur le duc, in order that my mind may be at ease upon a most important point, that I may know that it would be impossible for you to know whence you are coming."

" Do you know, Marinette, that you take very many injurious precautions with a man in whom you pretend to have every confidence? "

" Oh, no one doubts your loyalty, duc, that is above suspicion, but one may fear little weaknesses of temperament."

" As how? "

" Flesh is weak, duc, and my mistress is pretty! "

" You speak the truth, and I would not answer that I might not be guilty of some imprudence, if I only knew where to find her."

" You see, we are only doing what is necessary. There; here we are at the Palais-Royal, duc; I am about to leave you."

" What do you think the time is? "

"Midnight."

"Ah, and while we have been walking along together, do you suppose that no one has noticed us and felt astonishment at your leading a blind man about?"

"It is as dark as an oven, and no one has paid the slightest attention to us. Farewell, monsieur le duc."

"One moment, Marinette, one moment. Before letting you go, we must settle our accounts. How many pistoles were there in the purse I gave you?"

"Thirty-six, monsieur le duc."

"I promised you three times as many if I were satisfied with my evening's amusement. I owe you a hundred and eight pistoles, then?"

"Oh! monsieur le duc, you are too generous."

"Too generous! You shall have them to-morrow. Where shall I see you?"

"Here, to-morrow, at seven in the evening. And as I want to earn your money, I shall try to do so by rendering you further service, if there is the chance. I mean it. For, on the honour of Marinette, you please me very much indeed, duc."

"For my part, Marinette, I adore you for being this evening's brilliant messenger of happiness. Till we meet again, then!"

"Adieu, adieu, monsieur le duc; adieu!"

Marinette ran off and disappeared.

I had given my word of honour. I made no

attempt to follow her or to watch her. That would have been a trick unworthy of my honourable disposition. I contented myself with my part of the honest man who was happy and satisfied.

Then I tried to think about other things, and I went to finish my night at Marion de Lorme's, where we supped and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves with Miossens and Rambouillet.

CHAPTER XLII

The appendix to the preceding — An interval of two years — A journey to Marseilles—The Count de La Baume—A ball—I think of fainting—Double emotion—Struggle between my wishes and the remembrance of an oath—Honour wins—Virtue is always rewarded — A letter — Explanation of the mystery—Unheard-of details—It is the truth, though—The Countess de Lansac—A second meeting—I see Marinette again — I am indebted to her — Fresh happiness — A silent night—A sentimental visit to a child who resembles me—Joys of paternity—Its impenetrable mysteries.

THE next day at the hour agreed upon I was at the place fixed upon by Marinette.

She was exact to time.

On seeing her once more, my heart beat with violence. She recalled her mistress to my mind, and the very sight of her seemed to renew my remembrances of the happy hours of the previous night.

"Well, now," I cried, rushing towards her, "are you going to keep your promise, Marinette?"

"What promise, monsieur le duc?"

"Didn't you promise to bring me something, in return for what I am about to give you?"

"I always keep my promises," said Marinette. "I have been ordered to give you this."

And she held out to me a little green leather case stamped with gold ornamentation.

Mad with delight, I opened it.

It contained a diamond of the finest water, the fire of which astounded me.

"I would rather have had a letter," said I, with a sigh.

"If you refuse this present I can take it back," said Marinette.

"Cruel girl!" cried I, repulsing the hand which she had stretched out to deprive me of my treasure; "do you not see that, in the future, this precious stone will be my most delicious, my most cherished talisman? Whoever would take it from me, must first take my life!"

"Well, as I don't want to kill you," said Marinette, with a laugh, "I'll let you keep it."

"Here are your pistoles. You had better count them."

"From their weight, monseigneur, I fancy that you must have made a mistake."

"You think they are short, then?"

"Oh no! . . . quite the other way."

"Well, you are not annoyed?"

"It is just as you please, monseigneur. We servants do as we are told."

"What! are you off already?"

"I am waited for."

"One word, one little word from your mistress!"

"She gave me no further orders."

"Are you sure there wasn't one little word?"

"Absolutely, not one; but then her eyes said a great deal. . . ."

"And what did her eyes say?"

"They said . . . they said that you had been an exceptionally lucky man, duc!"

"Was that all?"

"Isn't it enough? Adieu, monseigneur, I'm off!"

Marinette flew like an arrow. I remained motionless upon the spot where our meeting had taken place.

At last, calling upon my courage, I walked towards my hotel, going over, in my mind, the extraordinary events of the last twenty-four hours, and looking with a hungry eye at the magnificent gem I had received, and which I swore to retain for ever in memory of that miraculous adventure.

Did I follow the course of events, I ought to break my story off here, and finish it in its proper place. But it is better, I think, to narrate the climax at once. I do this for the sake of the interest which the reader may have taken in my narrative.

Two years passed away, and I heard not a word, either of Marinette or of the beautiful unknown.

But one day—one memorable day—having gone to Marseilles on a visit to a certain Baron de La Baume,

a witty nobleman who was very fond of hunting, I was asked by him to go to a ball to which he proposed to invite the whole of the nobility of the town and district. The ladies of Marseilles pleased me extremely, and I made a toilet regardless of expense for this particular ball, which was one of the most rich and brilliant at which I had ever been present.

The Baron de La Baume's mansion, which was not far from the Abbaye of Saint-Victor, was an immense place, which was suited for princely entertainments, and the Baron's fête was, indeed, princely. The illuminations were of rare splendour; the interior decorations of the principal apartments were fairy-like, and about nine o'clock in the evening (which was about the hour of my arrival), I found an immense crowd already collected there.

I will not trouble the reader with the details of this ball, which, splendid as it was, resembled similar entertainments. The saraband and the pavane were in full swing, and the ladies of Marseilles were in full swing, and the ladies of Marseilles were enjoying themselves to their heart's content.

I gave myself up to the delights of the entertainment, when, in the middle of a pirouette, I was suddenly struck by an apparition which caused me to lose my head and entirely upset the figure in which I was engaged.

The Baron de La Baume, who was my *vis-à-vis*, cried laughingly :

"Oh! là, là! Roquelaure, what *are* you thinking about, my good friend? You turn to the right instead of turning to the left, and you have mistaken your partner. Are you going mad?"

"Thanks for your kindness, baron. But I am not mad. Only I have had a sudden shock, so overwhelming, that I shall ask your permission to retire."

"You have turned pale, indeed," said a young lady from Marseilles, whose hand I was still grasping.

"It is quite true," said the Baron de La Baume, "shall they go for a physician?"

"No! . . . a breath of air will be enough."

"Off with you, then! off with you!"

I immediately left the group which surrounded me, and crossed the ball-room to reach the door.

As I walked, my eyes were fixed upon a charming young lady whose toilet set off her perfections, and who, on her part, stared hard and continuously at me.

Her emotion, violently repressed, was visible to me alone.

I did not seek to conceal mine from her. . . .

But not a sign, not a movement of the head, not the slightest manifestation betrayed to the eyes of the bystanders the profound agitation to which I was a prey. . . .

It was my unknown!

Yes, it was indeed she . . . it was the countenance whose every feature lived in my heart; it was indeed that celestial creature whose secret charms were so strongly impressed upon my memory, whom more than once I had seen again in my dreams, each time more perfect, each time more delicious!

This unexpected meeting did not upset me so far as to deprive me of the reasoning faculty.

I had a promise to keep.

I did my duty.

I left the *salon* of the Baron de La Baume, without even saluting her whose image filled my entire soul. Certes, no one could have suspected me of knowing her.

Not only did I go out, but I did not return.

I had become once more the tender boy-lover of eighteen. This woman, whose name I knew not, of whose worldly position I was ignorant, had caused my ideas of love to grow young again, and had lighted again in my heart all the fires of passion.

Who would have believed it? I walked round the mansion, where they laughed and danced without me, fifteen or twenty times.

Just once I was much tempted to return.

But the remembrance of my oath restrained me.

I returned home.

What a night! I found it impossible to close my eyes. I saw her, I spoke to her, I was awake, and yet I dreamed.

Towards morning, I had one of those dreams which make one wish to go on sleeping for ever.

The noises of the town unfortunately aroused me all too soon from that sweet lethargy.

I sprang from my bed, dressed, determined to leave Marseilles as soon as possible to escape a danger which I felt to be imminent.

I called my *valet-de-chambre*, and ordered him to prepare everything for our departure.

My further stay at Marseilles could only be either very delightful or very hateful.

As there seemed to be every probability of the latter hypothesis, was it not wiser to depart, and so leave no time for my reflections to change into too agonising regrets?

I put on my travelling-dress with a truly Roman courage.

I had got as far as my travelling-cloak, the hook of which I was just fastening, when I heard someone tap at my door.

"Who's there?"

"'Tis I, your grace's house-porter."

"What is it you want?"

"I have brought a letter for your grace."

"Doubtless from Paris?"

"No, your grace, a man from the harbour placed it in my hands."

"Good, step forward and give it to me."

I took the letter.

I know not why, but, in looking at the address, I was seized with a fit of trembling which I could not overcome. The paper was scented, the writing was fine and delicate. What is more, I had never seen that writing before.

"Zooks!" I cried, as soon as I was alone, "if it should be from her!"

I broke the seal, and I read as follows:

DEAR DUKE,—You have nobly fulfilled your promise, and I should consider myself an ungrateful creature if I waited a single day without thanking you. It is two years since we met; it is also two years, as I told you would be the case, that I have lived shut up in an isolated country-house, a league and a half from Marseilles. Yesterday, for the first time, I reappeared again in society, and yesterday, by an inexplicable chance or providence, you were the first man whom I looked upon. Judge, duke, of my confidence in you: that meeting did not alarm me for an instant. But, then and there, I resolved to write to you, to unveil a secret which you have the right to know, and which I do not wish to conceal from you any longer.

You remember, duke, that strange night, the sole remembrance of which causes me to lower my eyes and blush with shame.; you remember our unexpected intimacy, that forced *tête-à-tête*, that interview which I know not how to describe, and which must have many a time filled you with the most disgraceful suppositions in regard to me. Well, duke, can you believe me when I tell you that nothing that happened that day was done with my consent? when I tell you that a hand of iron, invisible to you, but whose resistless clutch I felt, compelled me to act as I did? Perhaps you will doubt it, duke, and yet, I swear to you, it is the pure and simple truth.

I will explain myself more clearly.

I had been married, five years previously, to the aged Count de Lansac, whose wealth (the rumour of which has probably reached you) amounted to several millions. My father (and in writing these two words, which a girl ordinarily does with pleasure, I shudder), my father had caused my marriage to be contracted with the intention of rebuilding his own fortune, which had been considerably depreciated by hazardous speculations. He had hoped that the count, whose principal desire was to have an heir to his title, would make me a gift of all his worldly wealth as soon as that happy event should take place. He hoped, at the same time, that, the count once dead, and I the mistress of his immense fortune, he would easily obtain from his daughter the rewards of his efforts and his paternal cares. I had then a younger sister at a nunnery school, and my father reckoned on my generosity to give her a dowry, when the time should come for doing so.

But time passed by, and the Count de Lansac vainly awaited an heir. His character began to sour, he grew sombre and morose, he threatened even to try and upset our marriage. Dare I tell you, duke, nothing would have delighted me more? My modesty is outraged by this confession, but it is the truth all the same.

This threat rendered my father furious. Were the foundations on which he had built my fortune about to crumble away? He was deeply in debt, and I alone could save him from his creditors. His inventive genius, in this difficult position, furnished him with the means, which he explained to me, and which I now feel it difficult to make you comprehend.

"The Count de Lansac," said my father to me, "is determined to have a child . . . therefore he must have one." "I have no objection," I answered my father; "and I should be happy indeed to see myself live again in a son,

whose noble qualities would flatter my pride; or in a daughter, whose affection would satisfy the needs of my heart." "Very well," said my father, "then it will have to be done." "What mean you?" "I repeat, it will have to be done." "I do not understand you." "Marinette will communicate my intentions to you."

I had a long conversation with Marinette, and she unfolded my father's project. . . . Without pretending to influence my choice, he wanted . . . But why say more? You understand the terrible proposal which he made me accept. . . . To yield to some unknown lover, to the first-comer; the right to despise me, to throw my shame in my face! It was horrible! I refused. . . . I was indignant. My father suddenly came into my room; his hair was in disorder, his eyes were hollow. "What I have determined upon," he cried, "will have to be done this very night!" "To-night?" "It cannot be put off any longer!" added he furiously. . . . "If not, I blow out my brains; because I am ruined, and you alone can save me. My life depends on you. . . ." Then he left the place.

What passed that night you know, duke. Marinette, who knew you when you used to visit Madame de Guéménée, judged you for what you are, for a man who was discreet, delicate, and devoted to our sex. It is to that which you owe the . . . annoyance to which you so politely submitted. . . . All I can say is, that on my own account . . . I have never complained . . . of the choice she had made.

That choice was a fortunate one from every point of view, duke.

At the end of two months, the Count de Lansac celebrated by a great banquet the knowledge of the certainty of his long-desired paternity, and he made over to me his entire fortune.

At the present moment, duke, I am a widow, my father is travelling in Italy, my younger sister is well-married, and I am the mother of a handsome child.

You came once to my house, duke, by compulsion. Will you come a second time of your own free-will? I await you.

Can I paint my intoxication of joy when I had finished reading the letter? I began to dance round the room like a madman. If a doctor had found me in the state I was in, he would have assuredly ordered me cold shower-baths.

I had a rendezvous that very evening with the handsome Countess de Lansac.

Will it be wondered at, that I made my appearance with my usual punctuality.

A waiting-maid was on the watch to receive me.

It was Marinette.

I felt as if I could have embraced her.

But Madame de Lansac was at her window, and I hurried towards the house like one demented.

An instant afterwards, the window was shut, the curtains were drawn, there was a profound silence. . . .

I did not leave till the morrow at noon, in order to go to visit with the Countess de Lansac, at a neighbouring farm, a pretty child, who, pretty as he was, resembled me, so everyone said, not a little. I found, I must confess, a wonderful satisfaction in embracing him, and the charming little smile he gave me filled me with indescribable joy.

CHAPTER XLIII

The Chevalier Antoine de Roquelaure — His character—His blasphemies—He quarrels with the storm—He insults the thunder—They want to throw him into the sea—He escapes this peril—He is sent to the Bastille—I effect his release—His second arrest—The Conciergerie—The jailor's wife—The generosity of the Chevalier—His purse runs dry—The loves of Madame Dumont and the Chevalier de Roquelaure—Disinterestedness —A woman's heart — Escape—Imprisonment of Madame Dumont—She is set at liberty—Convent of Notre-Dame-Bon-Secours — Sister Brigitte and Sister Mandane—The devil himself—The Chevalier is melancholy—M. de Romainville—That nobleman's impiety—His death-bed—He sends for the two Roquelaures—The cordelier—The holy sacrament—An interrupted absolution—A confessor in a perilous position—The Chevalier's little joke—Romainville's burst of laughter—His cure—The last moments of the Chevalier Antoine de Roquelaure.

I HAD a cousin who took the name of Roquelaure, though he had no right to it, and whom I have omitted to mention till now, because he was not the sort of person whom his family could be proud of, and his behaviour did not always conform to the great principles of honour and loyalty which we boasted of inheriting from our father, the Maréchal. He called himself the Chevalier Antoine de Roquelaure. He was not a bad man at heart, and if I have any sympathy for my relatives, assuredly it was this one,

whose character, in so many instances, resembled my own. His gaiety was inexhaustible, he was full of fun and wit, and capable of every folly imaginable. Till now, the evil had not been very great, but his extraordinary impiety spoilt whatever was good and acceptable about him.

We had tried to make a sailor of the Chevalier, and the attempt at first succeeded, for his cheerful, breezy, active nature made him popular with men of the sea.

But he soon wearied by his blasphemies the Comte d'Harcourt, under whom he served, so that the count one day gave orders that his crew should assemble for a formal execution. No one knew what was going to take place; great was the general surprise when they learned that the Chevalier de Roquelaure was about to be cast into the sea without trial, a cannon-ball attached to his feet. He got out of this difficulty by putting M. d'Harcourt into a good humour by some ridiculous joke, which I do not remember. At Malta, he was put for many hours into a dry well for having threatened a storm, with horrible imprecations, while shaking his fist at heaven and cursing the thunder. Having returned to France at Toulouse, he considered it a joke to transform a tennis-court into a church, to construct a sham high-altar and tabernacle there, and to say mass, and marry dogs there with all solemnity of a Christian ceremonial.

All these little tricks made him excessively unpopular. Above all, the enemies of our family profited by the numerous scandals of which he was the cause to add fuel to flame in crying abomination. From another point of view, he was treated with indulgence by certain other personages, and notably by Madame de Longueville, who, in the time of the Fronde, did all she could to attract him, though, to tell the truth, he would have been a bad enough bargain for that faction.

Madame de Longueville, having learnt that the public mind was excited over the peccadilloes with which he never ceased to scandalise everybody, looked upon him as a martyr, and said in reference to him :

" Odsblood ! what is the use nowadays of being of good family and high position ? Is it fitting that a man of rank should be arrested for trifles of this kind ? "

She had the impertinence to invite him to a splendid fête which she gave at her hotel on the very day when it was rumoured that he was about to be imprisoned. He was delighted at the invitation, and in his joy he was unable to restrain himself from committing a great folly. He came to the entertainment disguised as Cardinal Mazarin. The resemblance was striking. Everyone entreated him to stop a joke which might have awkward results, and which personally annoyed me very much ; but far from beating a retreat, he made matters worse, and while wearing the costume played all sorts of tricks.

He got on a chair, and imitating the gestures and the Italian accent of the Cardinal, he preached a mock sermon.

Encouraged by the laughter of the crowd, now thoroughly delighted, he amused himself by delivering a mountebank's oration on the subject of the recent political troubles, in language fit only for a fair.

Hereupon Madame de Longueville begged him to be silent.

Whereupon he said :

" What ! madame la duchesse, your opinions seem doubtful, for if there is one thing in the world that ought to give you pleasure, it is to see M. de Mazarin made game of."

So many extravagances were bound in the end to be suitably chastised. The Chevalier was taken to the Bastille, and it required considerable interest to cause him to be set at liberty. But he behaved no better, and continued to shock all decent people. He was arrested for the second time, and while his indictment was being prepared he was locked up in the Conciergerie.

And this is the way that he managed to get out of his new difficulty. There was a jailor at the Conciergerie named Dumont who had a very pretty wife. The Chevalier de Roquelaure had the idea that this woman pitied him, and told her that, if she permitted him to escape, he would make her fortune. He commenced operations by giving her several hundred pistoles that he had gained at play shortly before his

arrest. The woman accepted them, telling him that she would think of means of escape. About a week after, she told him that she thought she had discovered a way of getting out.

At the bottom of a corridor which she pointed out to him, one end of which communicated with her room, Madame Dumont had noticed a wall which was only two feet thick, and which formed a portion of the back of the building. She set to work herself, and each evening a hole, which she hid by placing pieces of furniture against it, was made by her feeble efforts.

On hearing such good news, the Chevalier wished to be generous. He drew out his purse and gave her all that remained in it.

Madame Dumont took the money.

At the third visit Madame Dumont announced that an opening through which one could pass a knitting-needle had been made in the thickness of the wall, whence it was easy to see that a decisive result might be obtained in about seven or eight months.

This prospect made the Chevalier de Roquelaure groan, for he had decided to pay heavily for the woman's assistance, feeling certain that in this world one can obtain nothing except with the aid of money, and in putting for the third time his hand in his pocket, he found that he had not even a centime.

He felt like a fool, and stammered out several excuses. But, in raising his eyes, he had a sudden idea.

Madame Dumont was very handsome, and there are so many ways of satisfying a pretty woman! He was alone with her (for M. Dumont looked after his prisoners but not after his wife), and it seemed to him, the rascal, that the big black eyes of the jailoress sparkled like two fine diamonds set in ebony. He drew her towards him, cavalierly passed his left hand round a waist which offered very little resistance, and satisfied with his right hand the other necessities of the situation, and now he commenced with Madame Dumont one of those conversations in which even dumb persons show proof of a sweet and abundant eloquence.

As soon as Madame Dumont could speak, for it seems that the Chevalier de Roquelaure had prevented her doing so up to now, drawing a purse from her pocket, she said to him:

"Listen, sir: if you had known me better, you would not have paid me in money, which I much despised. Here are the pistoles which you gave me, and which I have kept, in order to return them in case you wanted them."

"Oh! fool that I have been. Oh! adorable creature that thou art! And I was blind enough not to see all your perfections! Where the devil were my eyes? . . . And you give me back this money?"

"Without a doubt. . . . For what you have had from me, Chevalier, I do not sell, I give."

From that day the work did not go on perhaps so quickly, for Madame Dumont feared to lose a lover whom she really liked. Nevertheless, her devotion overcame her passion, and one day when the Chevalier de Roquelaure was playing piquet with La Taulade, a prisoner for debt, Madame Dumont came to tell him that some one wished to speak to him. He went out, and returned no more.

La Taulade was obliged to finish the game by himself.

It was about time for the Chevalier to make his escape, for dangerous witnesses had been summoned to the Châtelet, and his trial threatened to take a very serious turn.

Madame Dumont, suspected of having assisted in his escape, was arrested and thrown into the prisons of the Châtelet. But there was no proof against her, and she had to be released.

When the Chevalier returned, at the end of a year, everything was forgotten, and neither his liberty nor his goods were interfered with.

He used his liberty, it must be confessed, in the most reprehensible manner in the world, and I note here the very first use he made of the indulgence that had just been shown him was to the great discontent of persons particular on the subject of religion.

There existed a convent of recent foundation in the Rue de Charonne; it was placed under the protec-

tion of Saint Benedict, and had been established in September of 1647 by Madame Claude de Bouchavanne, the widow of a certain Sieur Vignier. This lady, who was most pious and of irreproachable morals, placed her sister, Madeleine de Bouchavanne, a nun of Notre-Dame de Soissons, at the head of the establishment.

This nunnery had taken the name of the Priory of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours.

The following year there were already sixty religious women in the house.

The Chevalier de Roquelaure, who was a great admirer of cloistered beauty, had seen one day, through a barred window, a young recluse whose eyes seemed to him to have a hungry look.

His good heart was saddened by this sight, and he set himself to ponder how he could get into the nunnery.

The Chevalier, his bad qualities apart, was a smart young fellow (the mere name of Roquelaure made those smart who were not otherwise so . . .). He was not long in forming his plans.

By a system of spying, adroitly managed, he found out the names of two or three of the boarders, and one fine day, with lowered eye and contrite air, he rang the Priory bell.

One of the sisters opened the door to him.

He asked in a timid voice if he could be allowed to say a word to a relative of his, whom he had not

seen for years, and for whom he was charged with a message from one of her uncles.

"What is the name of the boarder," demanded the janitress.

"Mademoiselle d'Escalon," replied the Chevalier in the most natural way in life.

"She whom you ask for is indeed here," said the janitress; "but she has not kept the name which she used in the world; she is called in religion Sister Brigitte."

"Sister Brigitte will do," said the Chevalier. "Will you kindly show me the way to the parlour?"

"But," observed the janitress, "I cannot let you in without knowing who you really are and whether you come from her uncle."

"That need not trouble you," replied the artful young fellow. "Here is a letter which will prove to you that I have not come as a stranger."

"Let me see it."

"My dear Mother," said the letter, "be good enough, I beg you, to permit my dear cousin, the Baron Anatole de Vernemuse, to speak in private with my much-loved niece, the Sister Brigitte. He has certain things to communicate to her of very great importance."

Here followed the signature.

In order to enlighten the reader immediately as to the significance of the incident, it is as well to tell

him this uncle really existed, and he really did have a nephew named Anatole de Vernemuse, to whom he had given this letter for the Superior of the Priory of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours, and that the Chevalier de Roquelaure, by more or less doubtful means, had obtained the letter and made use of it, as has been seen.

They permitted him to enter. Sister Brigitte was sent to him in the parlour, accompanied by another sister a little older, but very much prettier, one Sister Mandane, who was instructed to note the conversation, as is the custom in these religious establishments.

The Chevalier de Roquelaure understood his danger at once, and immediately changed his plan of attack.

"If I make love to Sister Brigitte," he thought, "Sister Mandane would denounce me at once. Let me confess the trick to both of them, without saying at first on whose account I have come here. According to what they answer, I will decide to which of the two I will address myself."

It seemed that the conversation decided him in favour of Sister Mandane. The Chevalier perceived that Sister Brigitte had an indulgent heart, and that she would play excellently the part of guardian angel, while Sister Mandane might spoil everything were her pride or her self-love wounded.

As he did not care if it were this one or that one,

he fixed his choice upon the girl it was most dangerous to make an enemy of.

Sister Mandane accepted and believed in all the pretty compliments which the Chevalier had originally intended for Sister Brigitte.

The next day, at ten o'clock in the evening, the Chevalier escaladed the wall of the Priory garden, and Sister Mandame came to meet him in a charming thicket at the end of the garden.

These nocturnal interviews took place five or six times; but at length one of the sisters noticed certain suspicious footprints in the garden. It was determined to watch and attempt to solve the mystery.

The sisters were posted in the passages which led to the garden, and waited results.

It was perfectly useless; nothing moved.

The four or five old nuns who had been charged with this thankless mission returned very disappointed to their dormitories.

All of a sudden a black shadow rose before them.

They screamed aloud.

"Be silent, hideous sluts of hell, and let me pass!"

And, as they were in the shadow's path, the shadow hustled them, shouting:

"Thunder confound you! S'death! If the door is not instantly opened, I will thrash all your Jesuses, and make me a barber's basin of every one of your holy water-pots."

The speaker, as we know, was the Chevalier de Roquelaure, who had, for the particular occasion, changed the place of rendezvous. He thought it more amusing to meet Sister Mandane in the dormitory.

He caused such great fear to the poor nuns, that they allowed him to pass and leave the convent without recognition.

The next day, as can be fancied, the scandal spread far and wide.

The nuns were interrogated.

The whole community were called to give their evidence upon an event which might have the gravest consequences.

The bishop was sent for.

This bishop was a cunning blade, who suspected the truth, but he knew very well how dangerous it was to discover it too effectually.

After having listened to all the suggestions, and carefully noted the results of all his interrogatories, he assembled a secret chapter, which, after a careful examination of the facts in order to establish his opinion on sure grounds, was to give a decisive opinion.

The tribunal thus composed decided authoritatively that the phantom whose apparition had so frightened the community of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours could be none other than—

THE DEVIL!

The following are the questions and answers on which the judges based their decision :

To the Sister Janitress.

" Had the phantom horns ? "

" I believe so."

To the Mother Superior.

" Had the phantom claws ? "

" I could almost swear it."

To the Sister Mandane.

" Had the phantom a tail ? "

" Assuredly, a short one."

After such certain indications as these, doubt was no longer possible.

The chapter, composed of enlightened men, was unanimous.

It was the devil !

After this performance, the result of which might have been the very reverse of laughable, the Chevalier, more prudent than one might have supposed him to be from his frivolous character, did not trust himself again for a long time in the neighbourhood of the nunnery of Nôtre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours. People said, though I don't affirm it as a fact, that he did not pass through the Rue de Charonne for nearly a year. After all, they took care not to stir up dirty water, for the convent and the clergy were just as interested as he was in preventing the matter getting about.

The Chevalier de Roquelaure was exceedingly

fond of travelling. It would be difficult to prove that he ever remained three months in the same place.

His face was always changing, his features never at rest.

From one minute to another he would assume an air of foolish gaiety or the appearance of a man just come from a funeral.

He had one very great advantage, for when he wanted to joke he always refrained from laughing beforehand, as do certain society clowns, who do not know that the best means of leaving an audience cold and bored is to appear to let them know that a joke is coming.

One day, when we were assembled for a game of bi-ri-bi at the house of M. de Montbazon, the Chevalier de Roquelaure made his appearance.

He received compliments from every side. He seemed as if he hardly understood them. He bowed to the guests with an indifferent air and sat himself down by the fireside.

There he began to stir the fire, and there he sat for a full hour without opening his lips. From time to time the company glanced at him furtively.

"What is the matter with the Chevalier?" said the players among themselves.

"He must have lost his last crown," murmured some.

"Perhaps he is ill," added others.

"Chevalier," cried M. de Montbazon to him, being really uneasy at the depression which his countenance exhibited, "Chevalier, has anything happened to you?"

"To me?" he replied.

"Yes, to you."

"I'faith, no!"

But the tone of his answer betokened great sadness.

"It is not possible, Chevalier, that you are telling us the truth. Everyone can see that something has happened to you."

He sighed sadly.

"You see, one could almost swear you were going to choke."

"What would you have?" said the Chevalier de Roquelaure at length. "Is it my fault if I am in the dumps?"

"In the dumps! You in the dumps!"

"Everyone has his troubles."

"But you, who are so gay and so frivolous, what could have possibly happened to depress you to this extent?"

"I am the victim of injustice."

"A legal error?"

"Worse than that."

"Perhaps a portion of an inheritance, which the other legatees have been greedy enough to keep you out of?"

"Far worse."

"Ah!" cried M. de Montbazon, "I give it up; it is beyond me."

I approached him, and, leaning over his shoulder, I said to him:

"Come, cousin, confess the subject of your woes. I can see well enough that you are melancholy."

"It is true," he answered; "melancholy is the word."

"Well, come now," said Saintôt to him, "why are you melancholy? Tell me, I beg."

"You wish me to?"

"I demand it."

"Well, I am melancholy . . . because the vicar of my parish would not allow me to say mass."

Everybody began to laugh; the Chevalier de Roquelaure never smiled. When the merriment was at its height he proceeded with his joke. . . .

There was a tear in his eye.

While we are on the subject of Chevalier Antoine de Roquelaure, I will wind up this short sketch of his character by a little adventure which made his reputation, and was sufficiently diverting.

It was the year which followed the coronation of Louis XIV.

I had been sent for to M. de Romainville, who was at the point of death. He was a strangely constituted fellow, who denied everything, God, the Virgin, and the saints. He had never been to the confessional, and he declared to everybody who cared to listen to him

that priests were but actors devoid of wit and gaiety. When he was dying they asked him if he would not like to see some holy person before he died.

"Certainly," said he; "go fetch me the two Roquelaures, the real one and the sham one. . . . They are two good fellows, who will cheer me up a little."

"But, sir . . ." stammered the nurse.

"What?"

"If I but dared . . ."

"What is it you have to say?"

"I would observe to monsieur that in his position . . ."

"In my position . . .?"

"That perhaps it would be better . . ."

"Oh, plague take the rascal!" cried Romainville "one has to drag his words out of him. Speak out what you have to say."

"I wish to say, monsieur, that having reached your present stage, you would perhaps do better to think a little about your soul. . . ."

"And then?"

"About your spiritual welfare."

"And after that?"

"About eternity."

"Did your hear what I said?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Very well, do as I told you. I want to see the two Roquelaures. Request them to attend im-

mediately. We will converse about religion. That will give us something to do."

His orders were carried out, and I arrived with my cousin Antoine.

But, at the same time, it appears that the nurse had added something to his instructions, and had gone in search of a confessor.

He was a Franciscan friar who had a great reputation for the saving of souls. He used to brag that hell was annoyed with him, because he injured it by obtaining purgatory for the most hardened sinners.

Already the good monk was preparing to administer the sacrament to the sick man, and Romainville, being incapable of resistance, would probably have taken it, when the Chevalier de Roquelaure made his appearance.

"What do I see?" he cried. "And what are you doing there, Master Robin?"

"You see," said the Franciscan, "that I am preparing to give absolution to this repentant sinner."

"Tell that to somebody else," shouted the Chevalier, and seizing a loaded gun, which he had with him with the intention of going shooting, he cried:

"Be off, my Father, be off, or I will kill you! Our friend has lived like a dog, he must die like a dog!"

Romainville, at these words, sat up in the bed and burst into a fit of laughter, so long and so loud, that the abscess from which he was suffering burst, and

from the very next day he became convalescent and rapidly recovered.

Antoine de Roquelaure died young, and sincerely repented at his last hour.

His religious sentiments edified those who were present at his last moments.

Such a death after such a life! . . . Such a lesson!

CHAPTER XLIV

The Chevalier de Sercy—His arrival in Paris—The Place Royale—His meeting with M. de Montmaur—An officious friend—Confidences—Offers of service—Presentation of the Chevalier at Madame de Lusignan's—Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail—Sudden loves—The ball—Sentimental dialogue—The Chevalier de Sercy is the happiest of men—They dance till day—The Chevalier thanks Montmaur with effusion—The singular manner with which Montmaur receives his thanks, and a strange appearance, which would make one doubt the purity of his intentions—A little aside fitly confirms these fears.

I CANNOT here omit a tragic event which put both the court and the town in commotion at the same time.

The Chevalier Arthur de Sercy, a young fellow belonging to one of the noblest families of Brittany, in the course of the year 1658, left the château of his fathers in order to come to Paris to consummate a brilliant marriage with Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail, the sole heiress of the house of Velay.

Arthur did not know a soul in Paris; he brought no recommendation with him, except his good looks, his well-known name, and a letter of introduction,

written by his uncle and guardian, to the family to which he was about to become one of the most important members; stay, he brought something more . . . he brought one other thing, an excellent wit and an immense belief in the innumerable and precious qualities of his intended.

One evening the Chevalier found himself in the streets of the capital, rather embarrassed, and not quite knowing how to behave in the midst of the constantly hurrying crowd which ever fills the streets of Paris. He looked to the right and to the left, he advanced one step and retreated two, then he thought he would ask some obliging bystander, giving up the idea as soon as it was formed. Wandering about in this way, he came into a square space of about twenty paces.

Chance had brought him to the Place Royale. There he looked at the circle of buildings that surrounded him; plunging his eyes into their dark arches and perceiving the numerous streets which led to the galleries, he seemed in the position of a man who, being unable to choose in ten different ways, was unable to make up his mind.

In this sort of situation the most agreeable thing that can happen to an irresolute man is to meet someone who will suggest to him some idea, and thus compel him to make his choice.

This is what happened to the Chevalier Arthur.

It was after about a quarter of an hour, which

had been passed in marching about under the trees, when he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and a voice cried:

"Why, it is my dear Arthur!"

He turned and answered:

"Why, it is you, dear Monsieur de Montmaur?"

Then the two friends shook hands.

M. de Montmaur had passed three months in Brittany in the preceding year, and during his stay had become very intimate with the Chevalier; on his return to Paris, he had been appointed Master of Requests, but that did not change his character in the least, which was one of the gayest it is possible to imagine; he was even too gay sometimes, as the end of my story will show. De Montmaur's reception of him seemed so cordial to Arthur that he was delighted to have met him, and he immediately determined to confide in this friend, who seemed sent by heaven, the entire serious details of his position. The questions of Montmaur aided the intentions of the Chevalier, and, at the end of an hour, he had told his friend, who had consented to be his guide, his uncle's intentions, the motive of his journey, and the impatience with which he was waiting to see the young girl to whom he was to be presented, who was his destined bride, and of whom he had heard the best possible reports.

Montmaur listened to the confidences of the Chevalier very attentively, and as soon as he had done

speaking, he seemed to collect his thoughts with great gravity, and at length answered very seriously:

"My dear Arthur, let me offer you my most sincere compliments; the choice your uncle has made of Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail is a certain proof of his profound wisdom and of his friendship for you. Mademoiselle du Terrail, whom I know well, is a girl who is as pretty as she is witty, and if you will accept my services, it shall be my business to present you to her to-morrow evening."

"I should have wished," said Arthur, "to first deliver to her father the letter of which I am the bearer."

"That letter is perfectly useless just at present," answered M. de Montmaur. "M. du Terrail is living just now on an estate which he has in the Pyrenees. His only daughter is here; he has placed her with a friend of his, Madame de . . ."

Montmaur hesitated. Arthur gave him a questioning look.

"De Lusignan," said Montmaur, finishing his sentence, "and it is to her house I will take you to-morrow."

Arthur accepted with delight the amiable proposals of the Master of Requests. He begged him also to suggest a good hostelry, which Montmaur did with perfect grace, insisting at the same time that the Chevalier should promise to breakfast with him the following morning. Things being thus settled, the

pair separated. The Chevalier took possession of a room in a furnished house in the Rue Saint-Antoine, which Montmaur had recommended to him as highly respectable, and he went to sleep, pleasant dreams crowning his repose. In his dreams he already saw himself the husband of a wealthy woman, who was also young and pretty. . . . His arrival in Paris had been heralded under excellent auspices, and this happy beginning had doubled his courage. . . .

As for M. de Montmaur, who, as has been previously said, was already known at that time as a joyous companion rather inclined to tricks and practical joking, he went home radiant, his tongue in his cheek and rubbing his hands. The next morning the Chevalier Arthur and M. de Montmaur breakfasted together; as had been arranged, the meal was made merry by gay cordiality, and they drank excellent wines. The Chevalier pestered his friend with questions as to the best course of conduct he ought to pursue during his stay in Paris, having regard principally to the object of importance which had brought him there. Montmaur had an answer for everything. But, above all, it was when speaking of his *fiancée* that the fountains of the Chevalier's speech were opened. Impatient already, so to say, fascinated in anticipation, he wanted to know what her figure was like; of what colour was her hair; if her eyes were blue, black or grey; in a word, if she deserved all the praises of her beauty which he had heard. The

replies of Montmaur were, as must be said, the most agreeable and reassuring in the world. The Chevalier found the time pass very slowly till evening. He felt restless, burning with fever, unhappy. . . . The day seemed a century to him.

Evening came at length, and we leave the reader to fancy the sort of toilet made by our gullible lover. He took two good hours over it. Montmaur had promised to call for him in a coach; but long before the time agreed upon, and at every sound of wheels he heard in the street, the Chevalier would rush to the window, beaming with hope till the passing coach reached his door, sad and melancholy as it passed it by. At length, punctual to his appointment, Montmaur appeared, and Arthur was obliged to confess his friend's exact punctuality.

They started. How the heart of the Chevalier beat!

The Hôtel Lusignan was situated about the middle of the Rue Saint-Antoine. They soon reached it.

Elegant chandeliers hung from ceilings on which the brushes of the masters of the art of painting had depicted pleasing mythological subjects. The flames of wax candles were reflected in mirrors as in an endless illumination, and already a number of women, sparkling with gold or ornamented with flowers, filled the rooms. It was a magnificent sight; it was like a fairy palace.

The Chevalier, overcome by his feelings, was thoroughly disposed to be favourably impressed; flung into the delightful scene before his eyes, the intoxication of his heart was naturally doubled. He allowed himself to be led with blind carelessness, having perfect confidence in the success of the matter he had set his heart on. It seemed to him in the middle of this seductive and perfumed crowd that every hand was stretched to him in welcome, that all eyes looked on him as a tender lover, and that everyone smiled. His presentation seemed like a dream. Why wish to awaken, when one's slumber is so delicious?

Nevertheless, in the midst of all this peaceable delight, his one idea pursued him.

"And will you not show me Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail," said he in a whisper to Montmaur.

"She has not arrived," replied the Master of Requests, "she will be here directly."

"Well, since she is not yet arrived, my dear Monsieur de Montmaur, won't you give me a little more information about her."

"Information?"

"What I wish to say is, tell me about her physiognomy, moral as well as physical."

"Question me; I am absolutely at your service."

"Good; you told me that Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail is witty. There are many kinds of wit. Are you sufficiently acquainted with hers to gratify my impatience on this point."

"Her wit, my dear friend," said Montmaur, weighing his words well, "is the wit of the woman of the world, capable of appreciating all that is fine, all that is noble, in fact, all that has a universally recognised value. I do not say that her talent is the talent of the Agnès of our excellent Molière. You are a man of sense, and you would distrust a virtue so exaggerated as to make you suspect the deception of simple people by means of an adroitly-played comedy. On the contrary, you may perhaps think her manner a little too lively for a person of her age and condition, but that is due, doubtless, to the education she has received, a singular education devised by her father, thanks to which Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail has become, so to say, a child of nature, as simple in the ideas which she puts forth as in the impressions she receives."

"You have succeeded in thoroughly piquing my curiosity," said M. de Sercy,

"In conclusion," continued Montmaur, "don't let any little peculiarities which she, in your eyes, may be guilty of upset you; to judge her you must not do it as the Breton nobleman, used to your wearying, stiff, provincial society. At times, perhaps, she will appear to you gay and careless enough to petrify you with astonishment. But these are but summer lightnings. The foundation of her character is goodness of soul and boundless devotion. She never bargains when she can be useful to someone she

likes; and though she is very young, she can boast of having already inspired more than one sentiment of esteem and gratitude.

The Chevalier de Sercy was for a long while lost in thought. At length, seizing the hand of Montmaur with effusion, he cried:

"I am enchanted with what you tell me!"

"I am delighted to hear it."

"It is impossible for you to know, my friend, how the portrait which you have drawn has delighted and impressed me. I see one dominant trait—frankness; and, since you reminded me just now that I was a Breton nobleman, you ought to know the rate at which we, children of the ancient Armorica, value that noble quality. Often in our eyes it is worth every other. The most beautiful woman in the world would lose all charm for me if I thought her capable of a lie, and I would willingly pardon certain faults were they confessed. As for her careless and frivolous air, should I be mad enough to look on it as a crime? At her age, gaiety and carelessness, are they not gifts from heaven? Far be it from me to reproach her with them. Besides, this disposition of her girlish spirit seems to me an excellent augury for her future. May she long keep that girlish frivolity which is the patent of her innocence. . . . As one grows older, one grows reasonable soon enough. You say also she is good and kind. I recognise her, dear Monsieur de Montmaur, from

the first lines of your sketch. The lovableness of her character indicates the sweet qualities of her heart, and if it is true that, as you assure me, Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail has a knowledge of the noble and the good, she ought to be capable of loving. . . ."

"Oh! as to that, I can guarantee it!"

"It remains to be seen if she will think me worthy . . ."

"Anxious already! . . . Good God! calm yourself; this isn't your first affair, surely; you are bound to triumph in the end!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Now," said the Chevalier de Sercy with childlike anxiety, "I have a confession to make, dear Monsieur de Montmaur."

"Of what?"

"I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I am afraid that the beauty of Mademoiselle du Terrail may be less than that which I have dreamt of. And it will be your fault Montmaur, your fault; for if the colours which you have used have been lively in your description of her mental virtues, you have used as strong ones regarding her physical perfections. Have you flatterred my hopes too much?"

"Do you wish me to speak frankly?"

"I beg that you will do so."

so killing, the little frown on her forehead, that hair, so artfully disarranged and yet so symmetrically disordered, that mouth, with its melancholy smile, that sad, yet provoking pose, and lastly, that slow and queen-like walk of hers, what do you think of it all ? "

"I think," said the Chevalier de Sercy, "the effect is studied, that there is more art than nature, more pretension than ingenuousness. That lady has the effect, on my mind, of one who plays a part, she sacrifices everything to one purpose, which I think is not very difficult to guess. I may be mistaken, the accusation I am about to make may be too severe, but I look upon Madame de Belesbat as a coquette."

"I swear to you, you are not far wrong, Chevalier ; I see that you are a judge of character."

"No, I merely judge according to my impressions."

Montmaur made an imperceptible grimace, as though he had not been over-satisfied to find so much wisdom and clear-sightedness in his friend the Chevalier de Sercy. Then, as though he wished to try a last experiment, indicating to him by a gesture a lady who was seated near the fireplace, and who with lowered eyes was toying with a fan, he asked him :

"Have you sufficient confidence, you who are so susceptible in these matters, in the ingenuous physiognomy of that lady who is so rosy, so fresh, so attractive, who, in her little corner, dreams of I know not what, while thinking of I know not whom ? "

The Chevalier gazed at the lady for some time, and at length answered M. de Montmaur :

" She seems to me to have one virtue, from which we may justly infer several others; that virtue is modesty. She sits apart, she speaks little, and seems to love to sit and think. She is a woman who lives according to the dictates of her heart. Have I judged her correctly, dear Monsieur de Montmaur ? "

" Oh ! perfectly, perfectly correctly," answered the latter with a strongly marked gesture of approbation.

But at the same time a smile of amusement showed itself upon his face.

That lady whom he had just pointed out to the Chevalier de Sercy, who had so valiantly chanted her praises, was Madame d'Orgères, whose gallant adventures had been so much talked about, that her husband had obtained a decree of separation against her for the last two years. This time the poor Chevalier was completely hoaxed.

Here the conversation was interrupted by Madame de Lusignan, who came to make the most gracious and obliging advances to the Chevalier. She spoke at length of the honourable family of Du Terrail, with which she considered he ought to think himself very fortunate to contract an alliance. Above all, she spoke to him of Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail, his betrothed, whose acquaintance he was now about to make under the most satisfactory auspices.

"At an entertainment, at a ball," said Madame de Lusignan, "is after all the best place to meet for the first time in one's life. The remembrance of that interview and of its joyous surroundings can never be forgotten. And besides, the handsome dresses which you see enhance the beauty of their wearers!"

"Oh! without a single ornament," cried Montmaur, "Mademoiselle du Terrail would surpass all her rivals. Is it not so?"

"Surely, surely," replied Madame de Lusignan, nodding her head approvingly.

"She is very late," sadly observed the Chevalier.

"I must confess," said Madame de Lusignan, "that that is a little my fault. As at the present moment Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail is alone in Paris, I consider it a duty, whenever she comes to spend the evening here, to fetch her and send her home in my own carriage. To-day, by an unfortunate fatality which I regret, my coachman did not return at his reguiar time. I had him searched for, they hunted the neighbourhood for him, and found him, not ten minutes ago, under the table of a wineshop, a few doors from here; the rascal was dead drunk. One of the grooms immediately offered to take his place; I was only too glad to accept his services. In fine, the horses were put to . . . they left here but a moment or two ago, and I told them to make all possible haste."

The Chevalier blushed deeply, as though he were

ashamed to betray the secret sentiment which filled his heart.

There was nothing to do but to have patience. Arthur had to make the best of it. The mistress of the house, Madame de Lusignan, gave him no time to grow bored. Being a woman of wit, she chatted to him continuously, not of herself, nor of her guests, nor of Paris, but about Brittany, about his family, about his prospects; in one word, about whatever was really likely to interest him. The Chevalier could only prove his gratitude by not feeling bored, which he certainly would have been but for her manœuvre. Madame de Lusignan understood and appreciated him. Only women know how to deal with lovers by means of little delicate sentiments which gratify them.

At length a murmur of admiration arose near the door. Chevalier Arthur divined instinctively that no one but his bethrothed could produce such an effect. He turned and took a step in advance. A footman at that moment announced:

"Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail!"

The crowd closed round her, and Arthur, struck by her charms, remained stock still, with staring eyes, lost in the profound delights of happy astonishment.

"Now, then!" whispered Montmaur into his ear. "What do you think of her?"

The Chevalier did not answer, but his delighted eyes spoke for him.

Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail was really a delicious creature; her skin was white as ivory, her eyes were shaped like almonds, her magnificent hair flowed in innumerable ringlets upon her glorious shoulders; everything about her indicated freshness, perfection, and grace. Perhaps the fire which sparkled in her eyes was not precisely of that quality that one ordinarily expects to find in young girls; but the thing had been too well planned, the Chevalier's heart was too completely caught for him to make such a reflection. He saw but a miracle; nothing more, nothing less.

The formal presentation took place in a few minutes, through the good offices of the mistress of the house, who was most kind and good-natured. The Chevalier Arthur, though he tried to carry it off, trembled like a child. As for Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail, who was more able to master her emotion, she received him with noble ease and gracious amiability. Soon the violins gave the signal for the dance, and by chance or because it was planned, it happened that the betrothed pair were already holding each other's hands. They opened the ball in the midst of a pæan of praise, as flattering for the lady as for her cavalier.

It was a glorious and exciting entertainment. The pride of the Chevalier equalled his happiness. Every eye was fixed on him; he was evidently the hero of the ball, and never had Paris, even in his most excited dreams, appeared to him so full of seductive joys.

After the dance Arthur led Marie back to her place, and took the liberty of seating himself by her side; the charming girl made room for him, which enabled the pair to talk without fearing that their conversation might be overheard.

The Chevalier, novice though he was in the philosophy of gallantry, found himself much more eloquent than he had expected.

"I have always mistrusted," he said to Marie, "that love which is arranged beforehand by one's relatives and which ends in a marriage, usually an unhappy one, in which neither of the high contracting parties can have the right of reproaching the other for his or her misfortune, since neither of them were consulted in the matter. I am all the more astonished at the greatness of my good fortune, though I did not know it, which has destined her, to whom I would have consecrated my life, for me. Chance has played the part of Providence, mademoiselle, and I feel that the remembrance of this evening will never be effaced from my memory."

"For my part," answered Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail, "it is but right that I should confess that I am gratified at the course of events which has brought us together, and since the mutual wishes of our families ordain that we should be frank to each other, I avow to you, Chevalier, that I, too, shall never forget the day of our meeting."

We said just now that the seats of the Chevalier and Marie touched. It was quite needless this time, for it was not with the idea of dancing together that their hands met in secret and that their fingers were interlaced in a nervous pressure whose elastic communion went straight to the heart.

Already these two understood each other; already their hearts communicated by that mysterious sympathy which is sometimes the result of a single glance; already they had addressed the same vows to heaven; already they formed the same projects for the future.

Never had so pure a joy inundated the ardent soul of the Chevalier.

The joyous signal of the orchestra interrupted this mute and eloquent conversation. It was heart-breaking for the poor Chevalier, for he had to conform to conventional rules, and the beautiful Marie, were it only in order not to make herself remarkable by a ridiculously exclusive preference, found herself obliged to dance with someone else. Nevertheless, as love is never at the end of its resources, Arthur set to admiring his betrothed when she had joined the dancers, and could in this way see from where he was watching her that he had chosen one who possessed a thousand beauties and graces which till now had escaped his notice.

At such a delicious fête one forgets the flight of time. The rays of daylight, beginning to stream

through the window-panes, gave the signal for departure. He had to tear himself away. The eyes of the Chevalier and of Marie met in intoxicating farewell.

Arthur met Montmaur at the door.

"Ah! my dear friend," he cried as he embraced him, "what happiness! How beautiful she is!"

"I have not deceived you, then?"

"No, assuredly."

"Was I right when I said that my praise of her was below the reality?"

"You were, indeed!"

"But you are excited, my dear Chevalier. . . ."

"Does that surprise you?"

"Not the least in the world. Your enthusiasm would be unnatural were it not that the corporeal charms of that delightful girl . . . Ha, ha! . . . your heart is caught, then?" added Montmaur, with a little smile, whose expression would have much puzzled Arthur had he but noticed it.

"Oh! my friend," cried our lover excitedly, "to-night I have made a provision of happiness which will last me the rest of my life! . . ."

"And I — I have enough pocket-money for a week, for I have won a hundred louis at basset from President Tambonneau."

And Montmaur, having said these words, went off, throwing a sly look at the Chevalier.

"Poor boy!" he thought with a smile, "if he

only knew what is going on and whither his rare and perfect love may lead him! S'death! It is working capitally, and, if it goes on as it has begun, we shall have some real fun!"

CHAPTER XLV

The results of the loves of the Chevalier de Sercy with Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail—Visit to the hôtel Lusignan—The jokers—Sadness of the young Marie—The Chevalier's suspicions—Promised revelation of a secret—The rendezvous given by a betrothed to her future husband—The interview—Hesitations—An avowal—Montmaur's joke is disclosed—Stupefaction of the Chevalier—A pretty woman's humble confession—Good advice—The Chevalier takes to flight—He goes in search of his friend Montmaur—Five o'clock in the morning—The meeting of the joker and the serious man—A little friendly walk on the bank of the Seine—A duel at daybreak—Montmaur is punished for his joke—A tragic ending—Marion Delorme's melancholy regrets.

THE visits of the Chevalier to the hôtel Lusignan became very frequent indeed. Every evening one was certain to see him there, passing down the Rue Saint-Antoine at nightfall, and entering that pleasant house only to leave it on the stroke of midnight.

It happened, however, that he was late one day. He had received letters from Brittany; in one of them his uncle gently scolded him for being a laggard as to the matter for which he had come to Paris, and in it the good man warned him with an old gentleman's complaisant prolixity against the variety of dangers

to which a young man without experience and without friends is exposed in the great city. The reading of this letter, ornamented, as it was here and there, with obscure passages, the meaning of which he found it impossible to penetrate, this letter detained him an entire hour.

Let us see what was taking place at the hôtel Lusignan, where he was expected with lively impatience.

"Ah! ah! ah!" roared Montmaur in a Homeric burst of laughter, "can you say that you do not find it a pleasant, an admirable, a ravishing joke?"

"I think," said the mistress of the house, "that Cyrano de Bergerac, of comic memory, never invented a droller and more amusing mystification."

"And the poor Chevalier, he takes it thoroughly seriously."

"What fire! what poesy!" cried the society poet, who was dying of laughter . . . "never did Heloïse cause her Abelard to heave such tender sighs."

"And when one thinks," said Montmaur, "that the thing has already lasted for two whole months! . . ."

"And it is not nearly over yet," added Madame de Lusignan. "M. Arthur is a lover of robust constitution, and with natures like his, a little severity is sufficient to keep his flame glowing for ever. . . . Also, so long as our dear Marie shows herself ferociously virtuous . . ."

At these words, which drew attention to the

heroine of the romance which formed the subject of this conversation, seated at the table Mademoiselle du Terrail might have been perceived, very seriously occupied in reading a book.

"But what are you doing there, all alone?" cried Madame de Lusignan, addressing her. . . . "And why don't you come and chat with us? We are talking about things that interest you."

"We are celebrating your triumph," added Montmaur, emphatically.

But Marie never turned her head.

"She allows us to sing her praises, and considers herself modest in abstaining from contributing to them. She is very clever."

At that moment a sound was heard in the antechamber, and a footman flinging open the door of the saloon, announced:

"Monsieur Arthur de Sercy!"

There was a slight tittering, but everybody checked it and put on the mask of an insignificance and serious politeness. At the moment the Chevalier had entered, the book fell from the hands of Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail, and her eyes were turned towards him involuntarily.

Her eyes were red with tears.

The entertainment was not so cheerful as usual.

Arthur thought of his uncle's letter, and cudgelled his brains to discover its meaning. What was he to think? Had he not himself handed to Montmaur

a letter addressed to his uncle which the former had promised to cause to be delivered by a sure hand, in which he had described to him his first interviews with Mademoiselle du Terrail, and in which he had expressed his earnest desire to come to a definite engagement with her? What had become of that letter? Had it never been despatched? Had Montmaur lost it? Or had his uncle, from some motive which it was impossible for him to divine, made a pretence of not having received it?

These reflections, it may be easily understood, threw the Chevalier into a state of perplexity. He had a worried look . . . and his embarrassment was visible.

Marie, on her part, seemed sad and preoccupied. She, ordinarily so laughing, so bright, only answered questions which were asked her in monosyllables. Her voice was strangely sad, and her eyes, restless and full of trouble, never for an instant left the Chevalier.

Madame de Lusignan, without understanding the reason of this constraint which had gradually taken possession of all her guests, felt that it was necessary to put an end to it by some sort of distraction. Dances were organised, the musicians played, some sat down to cards, and very soon, if there was no real pleasure, the shadow of it reappeared.

Montmaur, in his quality of gay companion, took all sorts of trouble to cheer the faces which had become momentarily clouded. He laughed, he joked,

he chatted; his wit was appreciated, and by well-toned anecdotes, by well-directed witticisms and by fun, which, if a little forced, was still amusing enough, succeeded in restoring to Madame de Lusignan's guests that gay and burning cheerfulness which was habitual and, in a way, indispensable to them.

At last there came a moment when the Chevalier, finding himself close to Marie, appeared to forget all his troubles, to regain his gaiety. She was so beautiful, the melancholy which showed itself upon her brow but ornamented her with an added grace, so that the man to whom all these charms were so soon to belong could not do otherwise than yield to so potent a seduction. The face of the Chevalier once more became wreathed in smiles.

But as his countenance grew serene, as the smiles came back to his lips, Marie grew sad. At length she led him aside and said:

"Chevalier, I must speak to you alone!"

"To me?"

"To you. I have a secret to tell you."

"A secret! . . . Which concerns you?"

"Yes." Mademoiselle du Terrail's bosom heaved violently. Her respiration became hurried and quick, her emotion such that she could hardly speak.

"What is the matter, dear Marie, what is the matter?"

"Nothing. . . . When I have told you . . . that which I have to tell . . . I shall feel better. . . ."

"But speak, then . . . speak, I beseech you!"

"No . . . not here . . . not now. . . ."

"But . . . when shall I see you alone? Where shall we meet?"

Mademoiselle du Terrail reflected a moment, and answered:

"To-night . . . yes . . . yes, it is to-night that I must speak. . . . If I delay, perhaps I shall have lost the courage to do so. Listen, Monsieur Arthur. When you have reached home, open your casement and remain upon the watch. One of my women will give you a signal; you will come down, and she will guide you. . . ."

"Whither?"

"To my house."

"To your house! Don't you live here—here, at Madame de Lusignan's, during the absence of your relatives?"

"No more words; will you come?"

"Will I come! Can you doubt it, Marie?"

"'Tis well. We are waited for, for the quadrille. We must not keep people waiting, Chevalier."

Never had Arthur felt so terribly puzzled. The end of the entertainment seemed to him as if it would never come. At length the guests began to take their leave, and he returned to his lodging, lost in thought, declining to converse with anyone, particularly with Montmaur, whose jokes wearied him. As soon as he arrived in his lodging, which looked upon

the Rue Saint-Antoine, he punctiliously carried out the instructions he had received from Marie, and, placing himself at his window, searched the heavens for the star which without doubt answered mysteriously to the secret beatings of his heart, while at the same time he awaited with impatience the promised signal.

The hour of one sounded from a neighbouring church, when he perceived an old woman glide along the houses. She counted their numbers one by one, and at length halted before his dwelling. Arthur lived upon the first floor; she soon perceived him.

"Monsieur Chevalier Arthur de Sercy," said she, "is it you?"

"'Tis I."

"Are you ready?"

"I will follow you."

And the Chevalier rushed down the staircase and reached the street. Then he showered numberless questions on the old woman. So numerous were his questions, that they would have been difficult to answer intelligently; but the old woman simplified the matter, for she made no attempt to answer them at all.

Arthur followed the messenger in silence.

They did not walk far. At the angle of a street, the name of which Arthur did not know, stood a lofty carriage entrance, surmounted by elegant sculptures.

The door softly opened, and the Chevalier entered.

He had to mount a staircase of some twenty steps in the dark. Then another door silently opened, and the old woman having disappeared, he found himself alone in a delicious boudoir, lighted by a lamp hanging from the ceiling, the pale and mysterious rays of which were spread, like a transparent veil, over magnificent velvet-covered furniture sparkling with pearls and gold.

A woman was there who was dressed in a simple white robe, and luxuriously stretched upon the sofa.

It was Marie.

She rose; she came to meet the Chevalier de Sercy, and begged him to seat himself at her side.

The Chevalier gazed upon her in alarm, for she was pale, depressed, and suffering; her breathing was painfully irregular. It was easy to see from her attitude that she was the prey of some secret ill, whose sharp stabs caused her continual and insupportable suffering.

The Chevalier was altogether taken aback.

Mademoiselle du Terrail was the first to speak.

"Chevalier," said she, "you must have thought me very shameless when I asked you to come to my house. But I had to, I had to silence my scruples in order to do my duty. Permit me to ask you one question. . . . How do you love me?"

"How do I love you?" cried M. de Sercy with enthusiasm. "I love you as one loves the angels, Marie; as one loves purity, innocence, and virtue."

"I will complete your thought," burst in Mademoiselle du Terrail; "you love me as men love the young girl of their first dreams, the white and virgin child, who knows nothing of the things of this world, whose innocence protects her against any evil thought, and whom you would lead to the altar, because you hope that once the benediction of heaven had been received, and the priest had closed his book, to lead into your home a pure and spotless virgin, to whom you would be proud and happy to give your name. That is how you love me, Chevalier, is it not?"

"Doubtless, Marie . . . I do love you so. Do you doubt my love?"

"It is because I am sure of it," replied Marie, "that we must meet no longer, that we must separate . . . for ever!"

"Separate! See each other no more! . . . It may not be."

"It must be, Chevalier."

"But why?"

"Because! . . . because! Chevalier . . . one more question. . . . What think you of the scandalous lives of certain women, who, stripping themselves of that sacred modesty which is the greatest glory of their sex, sell themselves to the world as a show, and only use their charms to carry ruin and disorder into every class of society?"

"Marie! why ask me such things? Such women, I hate them, I detest them!"

"Arthur, with what sort of sentiments do these brilliant courtesans, whose lives are one long series of joys which are constantly renewed, and of shame patiently submitted to, inspire you?"

"With but one," answered Arthur, ". . . contempt."

"'Tis well! Leave me, Chevalier, quit this house, go from hence, without looking behind you; above all, forget the foolish love which once filled your heart, for I, for I am . . ."

"You are? . . . finish . . . who are you?"

"I am . . . no . . . I can never dare . . ."

"Who are you?" cried the Chevalier de Sercy with horror.

"I am—I am Marion Delorme."

The Chevalier sprang to his feet and remained fixed like a statue with glaring eyes, his arms stretched towards Marion.

"Oh! pardon me," cried Marion with lowered eyes, "I am not so guilty as you might think . . . no! . . . I am thought as light and silly . . . but my heart, my heart is not innately wicked; never would it have occurred to me to torture a holy and noble soul like yours, Chevalier, if I had not been compelled, if I had not been made to accept a part in the miserable comedy which has been played at your expense. It is Monsieur de Montmaur who is the head of it. It is he who proposed as a joke to make me pass in your eyes for Mademoiselle du Terrail;

this mystification seemed to him excessively witty and diverting, and was received with universal applause. I lent myself to it. . . . My remorse will never cease. . . . For, on the day after I saw you, I understood the nobility and beauty of your soul, and . . . I loved you. . . ."

The Chevalier stepped back a pace.

"I see now . . . you look on my love with horror, and you are right. . . . Hate me . . . do not refuse me one favour I am going to ask you."

She drew him towards her on the sofa. He did not resist; he sat down; she took one of his hands and pressed it with ardour:

"I told you that I have already expiated my fault by remorse; it is the truth, I swear it! I can be reproached with many faults, with many vices; I do not defend myself. But there is one thing I wish to convince you of, and that is, that I am frank enough at heart, and that I have suffered much in making you love me, by means of a lie, and now, I feel the dreadful results of that lie, when I tell you who I am, and thus put an end to the unworthy deception of which you have been the victim. And now, I want you to do me a favour, Chevalier. Be sad no longer! tell me that you do not hate me, and that you will consent to forget what has passed between us. You can never know how much I should have suffered, and I had to reproach myself with having rendered you unhappy, and above all, of preventing the realisa-

tion of the proposed marriage which has brought you to Paris. I know the reputation of Mademoiselle du Terrail; she is, I am told, a charming girl, whose beauty equals her virtue. M. de Villarceaux is intimately connected with her family. Allow me to present you to him, in order that he may present you to her to-morrow. It is a union which will do you honour and will help you at court. If it be true that I have inspired in you any trifling spark of love, the avowal of my name should be enough to blot out every trace of it. . . . Forget the false Marie du Terrail in order to devote yourself entirely to the real one. . . . Farewell, Chevalier; I told you just now to hate me . . . to ask you to do that is to possess a strength of will, which I do not . . . Oh, pardon me rather! . . . Oh! say, say that you have pardoned me."

The Chevalier de Sercy did not answer, but by an inclination of the head he signed to Marion that he pardoned her.

"And . . . will you follow the advice that I have taken the liberty of giving you."

He did not answer her, but raised his eyes to heaven in sign of doubt.

Then he gently disengaged Marion's fingers.

She wished to hold him back, but he rushed towards the staircase.

A moment after, he was walking hurriedly towards the square of the Hôtel-de-Ville, and hammered

violently at the door of Montmaur's house. Was it that the Master of Requests slept soundly? was it that he was accustomed to be disturbed after midnight? . . . in any case, nothing moved. Montmaur was his own door-porter, partly because he was very avaricious, partly because he was the only person living in the house, which was his own. The Chevalier knew this, and thought, doubtless, he was enjoying pleasant dreams and that he did not want to be disturbed.

He made up his mind to wait, and for that purpose sat himself down upon a block of stone just opposite Montmaur's house.

At five o'clock in the morning he recommenced his hammering on the door.

Montmaur came down, and opening the door a little upon the chain, demanded the name of his visitor.

"It is a friend," replied the Chevalier, "a friend who is particularly anxious to see you, in order to express his gratitude for what you have done for him."

Montmaur poked out his head.

"Ah, it is the good Sercy! Have you something very pressing to tell me?"

"Oh, yes! something very pressing!"

"Good! Wait for me a moment. . . . I will get my clothes on and I am with you."

"Don't forget your sword," cried Arthur.

This suggestion was rather a shock to M. de

Montmaur. Nevertheless, as he was somewhat of a coxcomb and a great boaster, he took care not to show it, and quickly joined the Chevalier. Besides, he hardly fancied that a simple practical joke would have serious results, but his confidence was very considerably shaken when he perceived the pale and downcast face of the Chevalier de Sercy. These signs were the reverse of reassuring, and they were followed by other manifestations which caused any remaining doubt as to the intentions of his young *friend* to disappear altogether. The latter seized him violently by the collar and dragged him to the steep bank of the Seine, without giving him breathing time or the chance of objecting.

Then Sercy loosened his hold of Montmaur, drew his sword, and cried:

"On guard!"

"Chevalier! Chevalier!" said Montmaur, "one word of explanation!"

"Not a syllable."

"But one does not fight without knowing why!"

"Really! For my part, I am going to give myself the pleasure of killing you without giving you the reason. Everyone has his system; that is mine."

"I have to deal with a madman! I shall call for help!"

"Take care you don't have to do with a murderer . . . if you open your mouth I shall plunge my sword in it up to the hilt."

And as the sword-point of the Chevalier was already well-nigh tickling his throat, Montmaur drew to defend himself. The combat did not last long. Montmaur, after having parried two or three furious thrusts from his adversary, was run through the breast and fell.

The Chevalier calmly wiped his sword and stood looking at his victim.

"That was a brave deed," said Montmaur, leaning on one arm, "and you may well be proud of it, Chevalier. I ask you what I have done . . ."

"What you have done, miserable wretch! You ask it of me what you have done! . . . I possessed a heart, which I reserved for a being who was beautiful and pure as the angels, and you caused me to give it to a vile harlot, rotten with vice and debaucheries! . . . That is why I have killed you! . . . That is why I am about to kill myself. . . ."

"What! Die?" groaned Montmaur, attempting to rise. "Die! when you have just sent me to hell! It seems you are joking, and that your joke is not a very generous one, Chevalier."

"It is but the simple truth, Monsieur de Montmaur; from this moment it is no longer possible for me to live."

"You haven't been so very unlucky after all," said Montmaur. "I don't suppose anyone else would complain! The lovely Marion has been your mistress! Marion, to whom everybody pays court, who

has the nobility and bourgeoisie at her feet! And does that prevent you, Chevalier, from marrying Mademoiselle Marie du Terrail whenever you may see fit?"

"Yes, it does prevent me, Monsieur! For that Marion, whom I despise, I love! That Marion, who belongs to everybody, I desire for myself alone! To that Marion, for whom many have but a passing fancy, I have given my whole heart, my whole life! . . . My heart is broken now! My life is now dishonoured! and I get rid of it in order to feel no longer the torments of jealousy, in order to have no longer to blush for myself!"

As he said these words, the Chevalier de Sercy stabbed himself with his own sword and fell dead without uttering a cry.

The blade had transfixed his heart.

To describe the stupefaction of Montmaur would be truly impossible. This sight of the dead man caused him to well-nigh lose his senses, badly hurt as he was, his blood flowing from a deep wound. He began to plaintively lament, and quickly fainted.

Happily for him, it was the hour at which the Parisians begin to appear in the streets of the good city of Paris. His groans were heard; he was picked up and cared for immediately, and little by little he came back to life.

This episode, as can be fancied, formed an inexhaustible subject for the chatter of the day.

Montmaur was much blamed, so much so that for a long while he felt no inclination for practical joking. His last experiment had miserably failed.

As for Marion, she was sick with a mortal sorrow, and at hearing the fatal news was dissolved in fountains of tears. She had conceived for the Chevalier a real and devoted tenderness. She voluntarily condemned herself, in view of the tragedy that had taken place, to an absolute retreat, which lasted for three months. For Marion Delorme three months was a century, and she should be given credit for a sacrifice which should have appeased the shade of the poor Chevalier de Sercy.

END OF VOL. III